

FOLKLORE AS RESISTANCE IN POSTCOLONIAL NARRATIVES AND CULTURAL  
PRACTICES: HAWAIIAN, AFRICAN AMERICAN, AND IRAQI

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## Abstract

Colonialism radically transformed the cultures of colonized peoples, often rupturing Indigenous traditions and folklore. Whether creating colonial discourse, promoting orientalist literature, advocating western educational institutions, or through biased media representations, imperial powers systematically oppressed Indigenous and Native peoples. Subjugated communities, however, created, and still form postcolonial discourse from their knowledge systems. This discourse insists on Indigenous and Native culture as central to Indigenous and Native peoples identity. This study examines the postcolonial literature of three groups: Kānaka Maoli, African Americans, and Iraqis.

The scope of this dissertation scrutinizes how folklore is employed as resistance in the postcolonial literature of Kānaka Maoli, African Americans, and Iraqis. *Folklore as Resistance in Postcolonial Narratives and Cultural Practices: Hawaiian, African American, and Iraqi* focuses on the centrality of folklore and cultural histories in the literature of these three groups. Kānaka Maoli emphasize the mo'olelo (hi/story) in their literature. Mo'olelo acts not only as a means to pass down hi/story and culturally significant stories from generation to generation (a genealogy) but also as a mode of resistance to hegemonic and imperial powers. Mo'olelo are not merely legends or myths; instead, they represent ancestral knowledge and connection to Kānaka history. Kānaka Maoli claim and revive ancestral mo'olelo in their literature and cultural performance to illuminate their relationship to place, 'āina, and their country, the Hawaiian Kingdom.

In this work, Dhiffaf al-Shwillay suggests that there are similar tendencies in the literature of Kānaka Maoli, African American, and Iraqis. The folklore and literature of these groups signify the histories of oppression and/or colonization and its aftermath. Al-Shwillay

finds that Kānaka Maoli, African American, and Iraqi folklore in literature can be read as resistance to orientalism, oppression, and stereotyping. Following the trajectory of the historical and cultural context for the literary productions of these three communities, she offers analysis and reading of Sage Takehiro, Dana Naone Hall, Haunani-Kay Trask, Brandy Nālani McDougall, Zora Neale Hurston, Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, and Selim Matar.

This dissertation concludes by emphasizing the dynamic political and cultural value of mo‘olelo and folklore in postcolonial narratives. Al-Shwillay asserts that literature that draws upon folklore and cultural histories transmits evidence of oppressive powers and, crucially, resistance. In this mode of examination of postcolonial literature, al-Shwillay asserts that folklore records the resistance of peoples through their literary production. Folklore carries the knowledge of ancestors, cultural, and history.

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Dhiffaf

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## Foreword

I am the product of many oppressive powers, and, currently, I write within a western academy, which creates tension within my identity, my writing practice, and perhaps for my readers. I was born and raised under a totalitarian regime (during the 1980s and the 1990s) that was brought down through western policy. I lived under the international embargo that sought to mobilize Iraqis against their rulers by placing them in detrimental positions. I understand and study within and from these conditions. Currently, I am a professor at the University of Baghdad, and I was awarded a full scholarship through the Iraqi post-2003 regime, and I chose America as the setting to pursue my Ph.D.

At times, colleagues and professors whom I came to know during my studies at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa question my choice of Hawai‘i. I do not have a prepared answer to their question; except that universities in the United States are competitive, and their excellence echoes around the world. Often, I merely answer in the form of a joke, relying on Arabic folklore. In Arabic, there is a proverb that states that a (hu)man’s destiny resides in his/her name. My name means “riverbank.” I am on an island surrounded by waters; I am where the water and the shore meet. This is a deep connection, though.

Now, after six years studying at UH Mānoa, I realize with clarity why I am in Hawai‘i. My academic and personal goals, as an Iraqi scholar, meet with the academic setting of this institution. I seek to enhance the construction of peace and protection for my people and other peoples living in states of colonization to promote sovereignty through education. Bringing the folklore stories of Kānaka Maoli, African Americans, and Iraqis into the context of resistance is not only an academic achievement but also a spark that recognizes suffering that requires dialogue. The dialogue I envision is built not on self-reflexive romantic ideals, but rather it is



founded as a call to support culture and narratives through an appreciation of the self and community as power centers.

This dissertation aims to dismantle stereotypes of oriental texts through Edward W. Said's terminology. Said argues that "one task of the intellectual is the effort to breakdown the stereotypes and reductive categories that are so limiting to human thought and communication" (*Representations of the Intellectual* xi). These efforts work together against oppressive colonial attempts that mistranslate national non-western folklore and spread disinformation. Hence, literature composed by the oppressed that honors their cultural heritages promotes authentic voices, defies western discourse, and builds culture that otherwise would be viewed through the problematic lens of the "exotic" other. Therefore, intellectuals and scholars, who represent their cultural heritage, are essential to undermine colonial and capitalist causes.

My work focuses on literature that draws upon folklore produced by three different groups in the context of resistance: Kānaka Maoli, African American, and Iraqi. The main focus of this dissertation is an examination of intellectual and scholarly work that engages with folklore literature/traditions as a means to build platforms for dialogue or debate against imperial and colonial discourses that promote subjugation, imperialism, and misrepresentation. Literature that draws upon folklore and cultural heritage is tinged with politics. Whether colonized, or bound by histories of slavery, or oppressed and exiled, folklore literature manifests a will to regain and reclaim identity. According to Michel Foucault and Edward Said, power and knowledge are intertwined. While imperialism built orientalist literature, the imperialists strove to dispose of native cultural identity; nonetheless, literature from indigenous and native peoples employs folklore as a type of resistance through cultural perspectives.

The cultural productions of a community or members of a nation are fundamental in constructing national identity. Drawing upon local or native folklore can be a decisive method of self-identification and cultural awareness in the process of sovereignty. Moreover, studying the literature of these three groups is a mode of resistance.

## Introduction: Folklore as Resistance in Cultural Productions by Hawaiian (Kānaka Maoli), African Americans, and Iraqis

This dissertation explores postcolonial narratives and cultural practices of the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries in Hawaiian (Kānaka Maoli), African American, and Iraqi cultures. Specifically, I examine folklore as a mode of expression and knowledge that functions as resistance, history, and cultural identity in the postcolonial narratives and cultural practices produced by these three different communities. This research examines both the distinctiveness and the commonality of folklore within these communities. My contribution to postcolonial discourse and theory connects these discrete communities and their modern cultural practices to current political climates in order to demonstrate that folklore is dynamic, produces new modes of literary production, and transforms previous (historical folklore narratives) as a means of navigating colonialism and colonized people's experiences and methods of defiance.

The folklore narratives, oratures, and cultural practices from Kānaka Maoli, African American, and Iraqi communities unfold as systemized cultural patterns that scholars and writers from within each group employ against colonization and the destructive forces of western<sup>1</sup> hegemony. Within the framework of folklore, geo-logic factualities<sup>2</sup> resist neocolonial powers by advancing and nurturing a multi-sided and multi-dimensional discourse. Thus, colonized communities regain their lost, or oppressed, cultural heritage by nurturing belief systems, folklore narratives, and community-engaged practices. Within the act of accessing folklore

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<sup>1</sup> I use the lowercase, here, purposefully. Rhetorically, it decenters the term (w)estern as a focal point of knowledge production.

<sup>2</sup> Folklore that is affected by geography, much like geopolitics, which studies the influences of geography, politics, and so forth on specific events.

traditions, marginalized peoples generate new materials that resist colonial attempts of cultural obliteration and subjugation.

The chapters within this work are divided according to these groups' cultural productions, and each chapter navigates and examines work produced both during and after colonial oppression. Folkloric theory has a double movement, diachronic and synchronic, which I use to contextualize literature productions from Kānaka Maoli, African American, and Iraqi communities. Additionally, I investigate the folkloric traditions of these groups and their relationships with the dominant powers at the historical times and places of their production. Folklore reflected in the literature of distinct colonized communities is an integral method of decolonization. It is also a medium of self-assertion and an expression of identity rather than a static component of a specific national culture. My research of the three different regions, i.e., the Pacific, specifically Polynesia, North America, represented by the United States, and Iraq is a contrapuntal reading of literature. In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993),<sup>3</sup> Edward Said (1935-2003) suggests that a contrapuntal analysis of literary texts is an antithetical reading of narratives that juxtaposes the building of empires and the colonized peoples cultural heritage. Said states: "We must be able to think through and interpret together experiences that are discrepant, each with its particular agenda and pace of development, its own formations" (36). The focus of my contrapuntal reading, however, is not that of the colonized and the colonizer's discrepant experiences, but rather between various embodiments of colonized resistance through the exploration of classical and modern literature from the regions.

In *CI*, Said reflects on the nature of the past and the "pastiness of the past." However, in the context of these three communities, folklore rhetoric of resistance supersedes the supposed

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<sup>3</sup> Subsequent references to Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (hereafter, *CI*) are given in parentheses in the text.

“pastiness of the past,” and it offers a means to conceptualize the coexistence of the past and the present in colonized cultures. Folklore, as a form of collective knowledge, is part and parcel of the cultural dynamics of resistance.<sup>4</sup> The folkloric forms that have emerged in the context of resistance vary with the culture(s) that produced them. For example, the form depends on the structure of colonialism that the community or the ethnic group experienced; additionally, it depends on the new realities created by colonialism.

The political, cultural, and social changes caused by colonization determine what form of folklore—as a living cultural and political expression—is subjected to new reproductions and transformations throughout different historical moments in colonized nations. In each chapter, I explore postcolonial contexts that are reflected in the narratives of colonized people to identify different historical movements of resistance. Furthermore, I suggest that these folkloric/historical movements were brought about through the awareness and understanding of writers, scholars, and intellectuals<sup>5</sup> who sought to share their knowledge to empower the people of their communities.

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<sup>4</sup> When discussing resistance, Foucault states: “Power is co-extensive with the social body; there are no spaces of primal liberty between the meshes of its network.... [yet] one should not assume a massive and primal condition of domination, a binary structure with ‘dominators’ on one side and ‘dominated’ on the other, but rather a multiform production of relations of domination which are partially susceptible of integration into overall strategies.... there are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised; resistance to power does not have to come from elsewhere to be real, nor is it inexorably frustrated through being the compatriot of power. It exists all the more by being in the same place as power; hence, like power, resistance is multiple and can be integrated in global strategies” (142). Foucault, Michel, and Colin Gordon. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. The Harvester Press, 1980.

<sup>5</sup> Here, and throughout this dissertation, I do not define “intellectual” as merely academic or belonging to academia, but also as cultural practitioners and others who carry the knowledge of their people and places. Thus, “intellectual” avoids a top-down model of intellectualism.

## I. Folklore and Folkways

I define folklore as community-based knowledge from a variety of sources, including ancestral and epistemological, whether pure or hybridized, put to practical use or appearing in cultural aspects of the community as a mode(s) or a method(s) of resistance. According to Dorothy Noyes, “Folklore is that part of culture that marks cultural practices of modern societies in connection to its past” (375). Additionally, Martha C. Sims and Martine Stephens, refer to the scope and location of folklore, stating: “Folklore is folk songs and legends. It’s also quilts, Boy Scout badges, high school marching band initiations, jokes, chain letters, nicknames, holiday food...and many other things you might.... Folklore exists in cities, suburbs and rural villages, in families, work groups and dormitories” (1-2). Colonialism and imperialism originate their own folklore, often extracting knowledge from colonized communities and repackaging it for colonial/imperialist purposes and global consumption. However, the colonized folkloric-ways and colonial-ways work antagonistically within a binary power relationship between the colonized and the colonizer wherein folklore entails a form of sociocultural counter-power among colonized communities and marginalized ethnic groups. Colonized peoples retain and develop various traditions that challenge the colonial matrix of knowledge and power. Folklore, then, is not static but rather dynamic multi-dimensional forms and means of accessing community resources.

Folklore as resistance in a postcolonial context is often deployed intentionally or spontaneously, yet systematically, by the Hawaiian, African American, and Iraqi peoples through their involvement in the process of decolonization—certain folkloric concepts such as communities or cultural bonds in social relationships and practices such as local legends and beliefs function in relation to resistance. In Postcolonial and Folkloristic Studies, folklore production—whether verbal, written, or material—develops by colonized people to express

feelings of oppression or to stimulate resistance. Moreover, folklore of resistance varies in accordance with the colonizer's ethnic and cultural positions, and, also with the colonized peoples' geographical, ethical, and political circumstances. For instance, to resist the Ottoman Empire (1299-1922) that invaded the Arab regions under the name of Islam, various opposition strategies, which focused on ethnic solidarity, developed against the non-Arabic Islamic colonizers. These strategies included the revival of and focus on Arabic heritage (traditional modes of identity articulation) in the Arab Gulf. Likewise, North African Arab countries, including Libya, Tunisia, and Morocco, developed Islamic-based grassroots resistance movements against western Christian colonizers. These resistance movements were commonly reflected in and supported by local folklore traditions. Hence, colonization stimulated/stimulates various oppositional folk-ways in folkloric practice. Consequently, colonization becomes the impetus for various modes of defiance.

Colonization effects colonized communities' every-day emotional well-being and colonized peoples relationships and self identities. Moreover, the influence of hegemonic educational systems in colonization becomes a force of assimilation that functions to remove the cultural practices and beliefs of colonized peoples in favor of the colonizer's. Antonio Gramsci states: "Every relationship of 'hegemony' is necessarily an educational relationship and occurs not only within a nation, between the various forces of which the nation is composed, but in the international and world-wide field, between complexes of national and continental civilisations" (350). The hegemonic relationships (internal, external, interpersonal, intrapersonal, for example), within the colonial practice, whether social or political, are embedded. However, through the lens of folklore, communities can access historical knowledge to counter detrimental modes of colonial assimilation.

Albert Wendt (1939-), a Samoan poet, writer, and scholar, reflects on the relationship of colonization, the Pacific, and educational system. In his essay “Towards a New Oceania,” Wendt writes that it is the colonizer who creates and promotes the concept of Pacific Islanders’ cultural inferiority.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the educational system was “devoted to civilizing us, to cutting us away from the roots of our cultures, from what the colonizers viewed as darkness, superstition, barbarism, and savagery” (79). For instance, Pacific schools, under colonization, were strategically structured to emphasize western literature and language at the expense of Indigenous epistemologies and narratives. This strategy of education is dedicated to erasing and discrediting native knowledge systems, in a process that Kenyan writer and scholar Ngugi Wa Thiong’o describes as a “cultural bomb” in his book *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986). Clearly, the term “bomb” suggests complete eradication.

Ngugi connects the impacts of colonization to the ways people think and communicate within African societies under the scope of imperialism. He states that the colonizer attempts to “annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves” as part of “mental colonization” (3). Under colonialization, many peoples suffer mental health crisis because of the annihilation of belief and community systems.<sup>7</sup> Often the effects of colonization appear as confabulations when a colonized subject processes events she/he/they tackle in their daily life,<sup>8</sup> which can trigger false senses of the “self”. In postcolonial narratives, the

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<sup>6</sup> There is a direct link between the colonized ideology of the distortion of the colonized culture and the emergence of cultural resistance that concentrates on reviving the past. As Fanon states: “Whereas the politicians integrate their action in the present, the intellectuals place themselves in the context of history” and that “the colonized intellectual” exposed the colonialist “theory of a precolonial barbarism” (147).

<sup>7</sup> See Fanon’s book *The Wretched of the Earth*, “Colonial War and Mental Disorders” (181-3).

<sup>8</sup> There are many definitions for confabulation. The contemporary American philosopher, William Hirstein recognizes three definitions and conceptualizations of confabulation: mnemonic, linguistic, and epistemic. For the present purpose, I confine myself to confabulation as mnemonic concept in which confabulations refer to “stories produced to cover gaps in memory” (Hirstein 19).



protagonist(s) frequently appear(s) to confabulate contexts. For instance, the colonizer forces the colonized to “see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland” (Ngugi 3). In the work of scholars and creative writers in the Pacific,<sup>9</sup> these issues are explored and problematized in the process of self-determination.

To resist the force of hegemonic colonial educational regimes, Pacific Islanders have reincorporated and revived Indigenous cultural practices to support their struggle against, what Said calls, consolidated western scholastic systems. In this text, I focus on the rich body of Pacific folklore in the context of resistance through Hawaiian mo‘olelo.<sup>10</sup> The Hawaiian concept of mo‘olelo (history, story, including folklore) transmits resistance. The mo‘olelo as a powerful mode of defiance and methodology in modern Pacific platforms demonstrates a communal awareness of the history of colonization and the colonialist practices against Hawaiian history. Mo‘olelo copes with the new political and global powers that focus on Oceania. The weaving of mo‘olelo into various modes of literary and scholarly production produces counter-narratives to western discourses of knowing and being.

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<sup>9</sup> For my work, I look specifically to Hawaiian (Kānaka Maoli) scholars and writers.

<sup>10</sup> Here, I mean that colonization adopted and developed agendas towards changing the nature of the colonized communities. Beside physical displacement, the colonizer attempts to change the culture and exterminate folklore. The colonizer sought to restructure cultural elements that represent the bonds between its people. The Native Hawaiian writer John Dominis Holt (1919-1993) recognized the ambivalent state that the colonized instilled in his people through the western ideology interference. In *On Being Hawaiian* (1974), Holt writes: “Many of us are confused. We do not know how to think about the past, even if we have some glint of knowledge of what happened then. At the same time, we are the walking repositories of island antiquity” (17-18).

The history of a nation plays an integral role in shaping and mobilizing its people. Thus, history relies on a holistic meaning, encompassing not only events and the art of documenting these events but also the inclusion of the social lives of ancestors and their worldviews, which, subsequently, informs underlying ideology. Western scholars imposed a form of violence on mo‘olelo as a source of Hawaiian knowledge (and the history that it exemplifies) through colonial systems, discourses, and practices. Western scholars disturbed the historical value of the mo‘olelo by interpreting it as myth, contrasting it to their modes of study. ku‘ualoha ho‘omanawanui states:

By their nature, myths serve as a foundation reflecting the worldview of a people. The popularized use of the term as “false or untrue” stems from a modern Western perspective that elevates knowledge based on science, technology, writing, and empirical research, and devalues knowledge based on orality, traditions, and intuition. (47)

Here, ho‘omanawanui builds on Cristina Bacchilega’s argument against Europeans and Americans who categorize mo‘olelo as “just” folklore, which, according to a colonial perspective, signifies “untrue” and an “over-imaginative” source of knowledge. Bacchilega observes:

Native Hawaiian mo‘olelo were for the most part identified by haole as “legends,” “myths” and “folktales” inter-changeably, and thus seen as “folklore,” a newly formed category in European and American nineteenth-century thought. Because “folklore” was and is often viewed in the science-centered West as an outmoded or “false” way of knowing, this classification has unfortunately also provided an opening to view the mo‘olelo as “untrue.” As belief narratives, legends and myths maintain a relationship

with history for scholars, but more generally “legend” is interpreted as fanciful or undocumented history. (9)

The *haole*<sup>11</sup> methodology of stripping the historical value inherited in *mo‘olelo* by confining it into a one-dimensional story, attempts to diminish Hawaiian knowledge production and sovereignty. *Mo‘olelo* is not static; it is a dynamic cultural entity that countered and continues to counter western attempts at cultural and social assimilation. Kānaka Maoli scholars such as Pualani Kanaka‘ole Kanahele, ku‘ualoha ho‘omanawanui, Brandy Nālani McDougall, and Bryan Kamaoli Kuwada demonstrate the capacity of *mo‘olelo* as vehicles of cultural knowledge. Kuwada explains: “Storytellers imbue their stories with breath and mana through the act of telling” while “their listeners inhale this mana and then have the chance to retell the story and add their breath to it as well” (109). Accordingly, Kānaka Maoli are active producers and audiences who, by way of processing and transmitting *mo‘olelo*, add mana (spirituality/variation).

The traumatic history of slavery, which is historically and ideologically pertinent, centers African American folklore. Folklore found in African American communities frequently combats not only internalized subjugation of the self, but also the subjection and objectification of black bodies from the white patriarchal systems that produced slavery. African American folklore involves a distinct vernacular which exists within the “Englishness” of the geopolitical milieu in which they live. African American writers preserved and validated African American folklore by employing it aesthetically and eloquently as a tool to resist the dominant white culture that marginalized their voices and experiences.

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<sup>11</sup> According to ho‘omanawanui, *haole* signifies “Amer-Europeans,” and refers to white Americans of European descent. See ho‘omanawanui’s essay, “A Cairn of Stories: Establishing a Foundation of Hawaiian Literature” (91).

African American Folklore Studies developed within the confines of segregation, which can be traced back to the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. Shirley Moody-Turner's book *Folklore and the Politics of Representation* (2013) suggests that African American folklore is as an alternative to the dominant western system of representation. In her work, she demonstrates that African American folklore is oriented towards modes of resistance. Moody-Turner states: "Black folklorists and authors could document, recover, and indeed create a black folk tradition" that acts as "an alternative to dominant cultural representations that often concealed and distorted African American culture and history" (3). Moody-Turner's articulation of the significance of folklore as resistance can be applied not only to the study of African American folklore, but also to Kanaka Maoli, and Iraqi folklore, too.

Folklore, in postcolonial context(s), is a cultural production of these three different groups that connects them dynamically. Said contends that "we must be able to think through and interpret together experiences that are discrepant, each with its particular agenda and pace of development, its own formations" (36). Hawaiian, African American, and Iraqi narratives of resistance link historically and culturally. For instance, in "From Hawai'i to Hampton: Samuel Armstrong and the Unlikely Origins of Folklore Studies at the Hampton Institute," Moody-Turner demonstrates the historical connection between African Americans and Hawaiians. Her work associates the educational system imposed on Kānaka Maoli and the political, cultural, and economic ideologies underlying Hampton Institute's educational policy. She traces the journey of Samuel Armstrong from Hawai'i to the Hampton Institute, arguing that, "Armstrong's missionary background" directly influenced "the educational principles that would serve as the cornerstone of the Institute," and continuously shaped "his attitudes toward black folklore"

(46).<sup>12</sup> Moody-Turner believes that Armstrong attempted to “oversee the initial collection and publication of black folk materials at Hampton” (46). She critiques Armstrong’s instrumental education following his father’s ideology of civilization and moral reform of Kānaka Maoli. Moral reform, according to Richard Armstrong, includes the extinction of native folklore and language.

Anand Prahlad’s essay “Africana Folklore: History and Challenges” (2005) traces the evolution of African-based folklore studies through an examination of the genesis and influences and challenges on African folklore studies. Prahlad believes that African American folklore studies is a limited label because it does not synthesize the folklore of people of African descent living in the diaspora. Prahlad applies the term Africana folklore as an “inclusive, organic rubric” for studying dispersed African folklore (253). He notes that African<sup>13</sup> folklore studies is mostly “consumed with the problem of identity” (254). A typical example of this connection between Africana folkloristics and the politics of identity debates is Joel Chandler Harris’ *Uncle Remus* ([1880]1982) depiction of the “unsettling mystery of black identity” (Prahlad 254), beside the “racist presentation of black people,” coated with “a fairly accurate examples of [Africana] proverbs and tales” (255). With this frame, Prahlad builds his review of the history and challenges what he calls Africana folklore studies. Like earlier Orientalism, the western academy developed a “system of knowledge” on Africana and other colonized communities to justify the exclusion and the policy of “Othering” Indigenous peoples and people of color, i.e., those who are not of “white” European descent.

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<sup>12</sup> The western project of civilizing the colonized by education is further highlighted in this work Pacific thinkers, writers, scholars, poets and activists like ‘Epeli Hau’ofa, ku’ualoha ho’omanawanui, Brandy Nālani McDougall, Haunani Kay Trask, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, and Albert Wendt, among others, all of whom recognize the problem of applying the western concept of civilization and education on Indigenous peoples and their cultures. See Wendt’s introduction to *Nuanua* (3).

<sup>13</sup> While I do not employ Prahlad’s term “Africana” extensively in my dissertation, I respectfully keep his work and terms in mind as I explore the field of African folklore.

Literature on colonized folklore and folkloristics represents resistance to the colonizer's attempts to control the folklore of non-Europeans. Fanon, Said, Wendt, and Prahlad anticipated the vulnerability<sup>14</sup> of Indigenous folklore against the colonizer and the imperial powers. The postcolonial narratives in my study demonstrate forms of resistance and the resilience of colonized peoples in their acts of decolonization.

## II. Postcolonialism

Literature that addresses colonial and postcolonial issues positions the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized and the cultural configurations inherent in imperial agendas. Colonization imposes cultural representations of the colonized; for example, the colonial view of Pacific native peoples as “fauna and flora, to be studied, erased, ‘saved’, domesticated, ‘civilized’ or ‘developed’” (Wendt 2); the orientalist’s representation of Arabs as “camel-riding, terroristic, hook-nosed, venal lechers” (Said 108); and the view that “Black is Country” (Baraka 82). Postcolonial texts and practices reflect resistance against different historical epochs and types of colonialism. These studies examine the political, social, and psychological perspectives on colonial powers.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, postcolonial studies center themselves in the stories, beliefs, and histories of the colonized.

In Pacific discourse, colonialism and postcolonialism stresses “post”—in Wendt’s sense, as I discuss later—and not yet postcolonial. Wendt states that the literature of the Pacific region “remains a mix of the colonial and post-colonial” (2). Pacific literature, which he defines as that

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<sup>14</sup> I use the term “vulnerable” to describe the folklore of colonized communities as an agent of resistance; hence, it is a defensive position. In her essay, “Vulnerability and Resistance” (2014), Judith Butler suggests that “nonviolent resistance” is necessary in order to “assert existence, the right to public space, and equality and to oppose police, security, and military violence” (ibid.).

<sup>15</sup> See for example, Edward Said’s work. For more information on these debates, see Christopher McBride’s *Island Representations in American Literature from Herman Melville to Jack London* (2004).

which is “written or composed by Pacific Islands peoples, especially the indigenous peoples” (ibid), not only resists western settler colonialism but also preserves Pacific Islanders’ cultural heritage(s). Pacific literature reflects a profound awareness of colonial agenda(s) and Pacific Islanders’ means of resistances. These narratives exhibit diverse, rich, and situated folklore that counters and problematizes western monolithic images of Pacific Islanders. Thus, in colonial and postcolonial contexts, the colonized have developed an extensive folkloric renaissance.

Dominant (settler) colonial regimes of representation maintain and promote the subjugation of colonized communities. According to Edward Said, and other postcolonial writers, the colonizer conceptualizes the Orient (or the Other) in the context of the western academy.<sup>16</sup> However, colonized individuals “write back” to “the empire,” narrating their experience(s) with/in the framework of the empire, namely (settler) colonialism, in their literature, taking into consideration the hegemonic knowledge implanted by colonialism.

However, theorists within the field of Postcolonial Studies, find the “post” in the term postcolonialism problematic, especially when the term describes the literature of nations that are not completely sovereign or those under settler colonialism. Bill Ashcroft defines *post-colonial* as “all that cultural production which engages, in one way or another, with the enduring reality of colonial power (including its newer manifestations)” (195). In a Pacific context, Wendt states: “For me the post in post-colonial does not just mean after; it also means *around, through out of, alongside, and against*” (3). The “post” in the term Postcolonial<sup>17</sup> Studies is not necessarily similar to post in post-independence; rather, it signifies the mode of writing about colonialism.

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<sup>16</sup> The nineteenth century professionalization of folklore studies supports building a system of knowledge about the non-western communities. As an example, see Turner-Moody’s argument on Newell, Armstrong, and other western-oriented scholars who support the trend of subordination in that era.

<sup>17</sup> While I interrogate the term postcolonial—specifically, “post” and the visual interjection of the hyphen in the term post-colonial—, I use the spelling postcolonial in my work.

In this study, I consider the intersectionality of postcolonialism, race, class, and gender, and the traditions and beliefs of each distinct community of people. Women writers such as Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Gayle Jones, bell hooks, Gayatri Spivak, and Chandra T. Mohanty, to name a few, draw attention to the lingering effects of colonial powers (in part, through settler colonialism) on native communities. For example, the African American women characters in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Hurston), *The Bluest Eye* (Morrison), *The Color Purple* (Walker), and *Corregidora* (Jones) are situated in African American communities in order to highlight double enslavement and the patriarchal nature that still encodes those communities. In *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representation* (1994), bell hooks contends that patriarchy is a significant force that modern critics should consider. She writes: “For contemporary critics to condemn the imperialism of the white colonizer without critiquing patriarchy is a tactic that seeks to minimize the particular ways gender determines the specific forms oppression may take within a specific group” (203). Her term, “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” highlights the forces that intersect and interact simultaneously in shaping African American folkways/folklore.

Considering cultural factuality, productions, and representations as part of the ongoing resistance to colonization and/or to its aftermath (including settler colonialism), by analyzing selected texts, I explore how the colonized created cultural alternative(s) against the new forms of power structures developed by colonization. American folklorists, Alan Dundes (1934-2005), and William Bascom (1912-1981), whose writings and theoretical works pave the genealogy of folklore as a critical theory situate “meta-folklore.” They argue that meta-folklore can be employed to analyze cultures that undergo colonialism or contacts with imperialism. Bascom emphasized the “attitudes of people towards their own folklore” in relation to culture (336). He



demonstrated his contribution to postcolonial and folklore studies with his interest and writings on African folklore, in contrast to dominant ethnologists and sociological views about Africa as “a barren ethnological field” (Morgan 371). Bascom’s method in studying folklore anticipates the postcolonial critique of representation where knowledge about the Other is nurtured in the western academy, serving the empire causes.

Besides folklorists’ and ethnologists’ contributions to the study the non-western cultures, Subaltern Studies marks the dynamism between dominant or hegemonic cultures/powers and dominated cultures. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s essay “Can the Subaltern Speaks?” (1985) explores representations of the subaltern by colonial scholars who apply depictions through deleterious western lenses. Spivak discusses the abolishment of the Hindu rite of Sati in India by the British as an example of how dominant western culture extends the colonial mentality that “White men are saving brown women from brown men (296-297). She points out how this Hindu community practice, in the colonized India, was abolished by men, British men (Spivak 296-7). With Sati, the British and their white audience perceived the ritual as a crime while the Hindi viewed this practice as tradition and rite. While Spivak’s article connects issues of representation through the frame of postcolonialism, I extend this frame to explore the controversial relationship between civilization and tradition in colonized creative and academic writings.

Studies of cultural identity shed light on the similarities and the differences in sites where the colonizer and the colonized meet for public judgment. Cultural identity, in Postcolonial Studies, is positioned against colonial attempts of assimilation and domination and appropriation. In his discussion of the new cinematic forms of Caribbean cinema in “Cultural Identity and

Diaspora,” Stuart Hall argues for cultural identity. As a black man<sup>18</sup> living in a diaspora, Hall situates cultural identity ontologically within an inner self as well as in a collective, or communal, self as an engagement with decolonization. Folklore, a part of collective history, national identity, and national culture, according to postcolonial critics, can function as a way to explore decolonization.<sup>19</sup> Here, I refer to Edward Said’s, Benedict Anderson’s, and Frantz Fanon’s perspectives on national and cultural identity, decolonization, folklore and resistance in literary analysis of postcolonial narratives.

These scholars examine folklore, cultural identity, and postcolonialism as tools to dismantle the hegemony of western colonial power structures. Said states: “It is a historical fact that nationalism—restoration of community, assertion of identity, emergence of new cultural practices—as a mobilized political force instigated and then advanced the struggle against Western domination everywhere in the non-European world” (*CI* 263). Furthermore, scholars in Postcolonial Studies explore the colonial occupation of the mind, and, accordingly, theories emerged contending that resistance of the mind is as necessary as resistance of the body and traditions. Said includes this as “ideological resistance” (252), that works toward restoring a unity to the colonized community. Ideological resistance includes both works of imagination and the restoration and transformation of national folklore. Said writes that “decolonization is...replete with works of the imagination, scholarship and counter-scholarship (264). Frantz

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<sup>18</sup> Fanon states that in resisting western views of Africans as one race, Africans look at themselves not as a nation but as a race or ethnicity.

<sup>19</sup> In some cases, folklore is manipulated to serve legitimization causes in nation-state domains. The government of Benito Mussolini, the Italian prime minister (1922-1943), manipulated folklore to connect with people in their political indoctrination process. For information about a specific example of folklore and Fascism, see Tomie De Paola, *The Legend of Old Befana: An Italian Christmas Story Retold and Illustrated* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1980). See also *Propaganda and War 1939-1945* by Robert Cole (2010). In this book, Cole explores how different nations during the Second World War employed mass-media to mobilize people, partly by utilizing national folklore and heritage.

Fanon also insists that the decolonization process extends not only to the physical occupation, but also within a psychological and social context. Decolonization is then a process that engages different forms of cultural productions, academic discourses, as well as the development of alternative rhetoric that works against neocolonial discourses.

Activists, writers, and scholars employ folklore and folklore studies as a means to engage with national and cultural identity at sites of resistance. According to Fanon, during decolonization, folklore undergoes dynamic and transformative processes, rather than being abstract stories of history that are not connected to the present realities of the colonized people, folklore relates to history and forms new places of defiance (168). National culture signifies “the collective thought process of a people to describe, justify, and extol the actions whereby they have joined forces and remained strong” (ibid.). Hence, during the struggle for liberation, national culture—including folklore—becomes an agent in the battlefield of decolonization.

Fanon states that “every culture is first and foremost national” (154). The concept of nationalism, which falls within the purview of a decolonization process in Postcolonial Studies, founds cultural structures and beliefs and practices. The formation of a nation, according to postcolonial writers, necessitates national culture, which has a collective identity, history, and memory. Beside satisfying “all those indispensable requirements for culture which alone can give it credibility, validity, dynamism, and creativity,” Fanon asserts “the struggle for nationhood...unlocks culture and opens the doors of creation” (177). For instance, in a Pacific Studies context, activist and scholars within the field argue that land is ancestry/genealogical,

and it has spiritual value that connects it to a cultural and national heritage that works against settler colonization.<sup>20</sup>

In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983), Benedict Anderson states that nation-ness, nationality, and nationalism are “cultural artifacts of a particular kind” (4). Therefore, nationalism situates the significance of my argument that folklore is resistance in the struggle of liberation and decolonization. Anderson views nationalism as an invented and politically imagined community with frontiers that should be protected. The term “community” is termed “imagined” because its members do not know each other, yet they feel kinship<sup>21</sup> and intimacy works in a horizontal manner in which class relations collapsed through the unified goal of its members.

Connected to the concept of nation-ness is the national culture. National culture signifies the forces, ideals, thoughts, and beliefs of people who live under sovereign nations. Colonialists and imperialists targeted this layer of culture to widen their control by separating people within a nation to their sources of unity. National culture is not identical with folklore in the Fanonian framework. In his book *The Wretched of the Earth* (1954), Fanon reflects on nationalism and the

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<sup>20</sup> For example, Haunani-Kay Trask connects land to genealogy. She describes the Hawaiian relationship to land as “familial” relation. She contends that “[t]he land is our mother and we are her children. This is the lesson of our genealogy” (80).

<sup>21</sup> Kinship is a significant concept to Cultural Studies. I situate kinship within the framework of two connections to resistance: First, in the context of resistance to colonialism, kinship is nurtured under the anti-kinship slavery system. Second, kinship and connection to ancestors is important in Kānaka Maoli resistance discourse. Kinship to Nā Kānaka Maoli is not limited to blood or blood quantum, but rather to genealogical ties. Hence, kinship in culture has a genealogical value which is raised against current colonial biases. For more information about this issue and the Hawaiian variation of this particular concept, see J. Kehaulani Kauanui’s introduction to *Hawaiian Blood: Colonialism and the Politics of Sovereignty and Indigeneity* (2008). For a deeper understanding about the subject, refer to the section entitled “Hawaiian Origins, Genealogy, and Kinship” (43). According to Kanaka Maoli, kinship is not only blood quantum but kinship. There are debates about the meaning of kinship and whether it is limited to procreation or other determinations. Anthropologist Janet Carsten states, in her study of kinship among Malay at Langkawi, “The Substance of Kinship and the Heat of the Hearth: Feeding, Personhood, and Relatedness among Malays in Pulau Langkawi,” that the meaning of kinship “cannot be assumed a priori” (224). See David M. Schneider’s book *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (1984) (esp.195-198) for details about the study of kinship and its cultural variation. This anthropological debate is particularly important for researchers interested in the concept of kinship among Pacific Islanders, especially Kanaka Maoli.

national culture of colonized communities. He differentiates between national culture and folklore. As an advocate for armed struggles for liberation, he contends: “National culture is not folklore” (188). He states that folklore is the site “where an abstract populism is convinced it has uncovered the popular truth” (Fanon168). National culture, in his view, is “the collective thought process of a people to describe, justify, and extol the actions whereby they have joined forces and remained strong” (Fanon168). The separation of African Americans from their past persists in other many contexts. Under colonization, the Pacific witnessed a wave of erosion of almost everything related to the past. Iraqis continue to experience states of disconnectedness to their national culture by submission to western control, wars, international economical sieges, for instance. These attacks, in scope, are expansive, including, regions, ancestral knowledge, the land, language, and cultural practices. Various attempts to reconnect people to their historical and cultural resources of resistance work to subvert these attacks.

Kānaka Maoli, for example, struggle to establish connections to their traditional culture to recapture their oppressed heritage. In academia, scholars navigate Pacific modes of resistance, viewing culture as dynamic, not living in the past. An example of this resistance can be found in the debate on Pacific cultural identity between Albert Wendt and the Tongan writer ‘Epeli Hau‘ofa (1939-2009). In 1976, Wendt presented his ideas on Pacific culture in which he envisions a new Oceanic culture. This Oceania, however, is not a resurrection of the past, but rather a new culture which has its roots in a pre-colonial past. In response to Wendt’s article, Hau‘ofa envisions a unifying “Pacific Way” for building a regional identity which is “grounded in something as vast as the sea” and it “should exercise our [Pacific Islanders’] minds and rekindle in us the spirit that sent our ancestors to explore the oceanic unknown and make it their home, our home” (393). This identity, Hau‘ofa argues, is necessary for “pursuers of

strengthening ancestral cultures in the struggle to regain sovereignty” (393). He demonstrates that regional identity is far from being a kind of “cultural hegemony.” The regional identity, then, is not intended to abolish or substitute other identities, but, instead, will be an additional identity that will “serve to enrich our other selves” (393). Wendt and Hau‘ofa’s theories guide my analysis of Pacific literature in the context of colonization and decolonization; especially the ways in which Native writers conceive Pacific literature and depict it as postcolonial resistance to settler colonialism.<sup>22</sup>

## Summaries of the Main Chapters

### Chapter One: Pacific Passages of Resistance

This chapter focuses on the Kānaka Maoli resurgence of cultural heritage and mo‘olelo as a means of resisting western hegemonic powers. Here, I study three significant Kānaka Maoli elements of resistance: language, land, and ancestors through the framework of literary production. My work explores how these modes of resistance function in literature and cultural practices. I demonstrate that Kānaka Maoli relied/rely on folklore as a means of liberation and a path to decolonization and sovereignty.

Furthermore, I explore the ways in which Kānaka Maoli intellectuals, scholars, activists, and writers recognize mo‘olelo as a mode of knowledge. The Kānaka Maoli people employ mo‘olelo and kūpuna mo‘olelo techniques in their writing as an insistence on cultural identity, which is rooted in orature. The tradition of drawing upon mo‘olelo, whether in content or style, challenges established western cultural systems.

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<sup>22</sup> See Wendt’s introduction to *Nuanua: Pacific Writing in English since 1980*, especially p. 3.

## Chapter Two: African American Discourses of Resistance

In this chapter, I focus on African Americans' connections to their folklore. African American folklore is not only a means of expression and communication but also a form of defiance of western oppression. For this section, I center my studies on Zora Neale Hurston's employment of African American folklore in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and two of her short stories "Sweat" and "Gilded Six-Bit".

I concentrate on the metaphoric dimension of the characters in her novel and her use of folklore in all three stories I examine. Additionally, I situate African American vernacular as a mode of resistance. I navigate folklore in relation to Hurston's characters' day-to-day conversations where "Words walking without masters; walking altogether like harmony in a song" (Hurston *Their Eyes* 2). In this context, social communications trouble the lines of oppression and domination, creating community and empowering social bonds.

## Chapter Three: Folklore of Resistance in Postcolonial Iraq

In this chapter, I contend that Iraqi writers draw from folklore, whether classic or contemporary, in order to rebuild national heritage that successive years of colonizations and the aftermath of war wrought on the country. My work focuses, specifically, on two Iraqi activists, intellectuals, scholars, and writers: Badr Shakir al-Sayyab (1926-1964) and Selim Matar (1956-).

Al-Sayyab uses myths and legends in his poetry to resist the Iraqi regime of his time. The section on al-Sayyab navigates modes of borrowing; specifically, exploring how al-Sayyab reenergizes folklore traditions to expose or "speak back" to governmental oppression. The poems "Cerberus in Babylon," "City without Rain," and "Hymn of the Rain" allude to mythical figures and the political climate of Iraq, and they also showcase al-Sayyab's dynamic voice.

In the second section of Chapter Three, I examine Selim Matar's (1956-) novel *The Woman of the Flask* (1990). Matar is an Iraqi scholar and novelist who lives in exile in Switzerland. *The Woman of the Flask* reflects on Iraqi memory, (his)story, and the legacy of legends and myths. Matar creates spaces of resistance where the personal merges with the political in his work. Additionally, his novel illuminates the life of an intellectual in exile. Said writes: "Many exiles seem to be novelists, chess players, political activists, and intellectuals" for "[m]uch of the exile's life is taken up with compensating for disorienting loss by creating a new world to rule" (144). *The Woman of the Flask* is a journey of an exile moving from a state of identity loss to a state in which identity is regained through, culture, national identity, stories, and ancestors.



## Chapter One: Pacific Passages of Resistance

This chapter explores Kānaka Maoli resistance through literature, with a focus on mo‘olelo, as a response to the violation and cultural damage that western contact brought to the Hawaiian Islands. This chapter establishes localized literature as a hegemonic and ideological battleground. On one side of this battleground, western interests used literature during the long process of attempted Hawaiian domination to nullify traditional values, norms, and identity. On the other, is a detailed analysis of Kānaka Maoli literature as resistance to cultural hegemony, and the reinforcement of tradition and memory as a subversive counter to the western establishment. These systems of dominance and resistance have managed to both change in response to historical shifts across a period of hundreds of years, from initial western contact in the late 1700s to present day; and stay the same, as in the faithful maintaining of core cultural Hawaiian values.

### Situating Hawai‘i in Postcolonial Discourse: A Historical Sketch

The conquest of Hawai‘i was not a quick invasion; instead, it was a slow, gradual, and insidious process culminated by annexation (LaFeber xvii). This colonization process began with exploratory voyages, which brought missionaries and began a process of erasure of native culture. Since the initial western contact, foreigners to Hawai‘i have been implanted (settlers) into the area in order to establish genealogies, accumulate land, and set up enterprises that ultimately led to the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom, the genocide of Kānaka Maoli, and the attempted abolishment of traditional Hawaiian culture.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Here, I use genocide as an equivalent of denationalization.

European missionaries brought explicit and violent changes to the Kānaka Maoli system of life, culture, and education. Waves of missionaries, starting with the Calvinists, entered the Island in 1820. Western powers sent and supported missionaries to convert Kānaka Maoli to Christianity. They also built connections with the ruling classes in an attempt to deepen their roots in Hawai'i.<sup>24</sup> Following the early years of western contact, these missionaries established a more paternalistic colonial paradigm, to use Michelle Keown's<sup>25</sup> terminology. They saw the Pacific as one culture and immediately established a distorted, paternalistic image of the indigenous Pacific people as savages in need of western acculturation.

They represented the Polynesian as "childlike, lazy, and savage" in their written records. For example, William Ellis and John Williams' research suggests a moral responsibility towards taking care of the Polynesians. They describe them as "'indolent,' 'peculiarly addicted to pleasure,' and prone to 'barbarous' and 'cruel' social practices such as infanticide" (qtd. in Keown 35). Ellis's ethnographic research (1829) points to the Christian missionaries' role in educating the Polynesians' "curiosity and aptitude for learning" (qtd. in Keown 36). This education included prohibiting Kānaka Maoli from engaging in cultural practices such as surfing and Hula, which were both later commodified for capitalist causes (Skwiot 112).<sup>26</sup> In an attempt to broaden their mission to spread Christianity, the missionaries began to translate the Bible to

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<sup>24</sup> A recent study by Jennifer Thigpen (2014) discusses the missionaries connection with the ruling class women. Thigpen demonstrates the role of women in developing an intercultural Pacific culture by studying the significance of the gift exchange cycle between and among Hawaiian Ali'i women and the missionaries' wives. For the role of Ka'ahumanu, wife of Kamehameha, in advancing 'ainoa 'free-eating' against the kapu 'taboo' embedded in Hawaiian religious system refer to C. M. Kaliko Baker's essay "Constructing Kānaka Maoli identity through narrative A glimpse into native Hawaiian narratives" in *Narrative and Identity Construction in the Pacific Islands*, edited by Farzana Gounder, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2015. See also Silva, *The Power of the Steel-Tipped Pen* 55-56.

<sup>25</sup> One of the fundamental works on the history of Pacific colonization is *Pacific Islands Writing: the Postcolonial Literatures of Aotearoa/New Zealand and Oceania* by Michelle Keown. Keown's book presents an in-depth and overarching history of colonization in the Pacific region covering Hawai'i, Tahiti, Samoa, French Polynesia, New Zealand, and other Pacific places.

<sup>26</sup> For the impact of missionaries on Kānaka Maoli culture see a recent study made by J. Revell. Carr, entitled *Hawaiian Music in Motion : Mariners, Missionaries, and Minstrels* ( 2014).

‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i, an intention that pushed them to put ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i into written form.<sup>27</sup>

Working with missionaries, Kānaka Maoli scholars created a written system of ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i that saw newspapers printed as early as 1834. Almost as soon as the technology was developed, Kānaka Maoli used writing as a medium of preserving history and promoting cultural acts. This act of reviving and preserving Kānaka Maoli culture through writing began in newspapers<sup>28</sup> written in ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i.

Starting in 1861, Hawaiian newspapers quickly grew to represent Kānaka Maoli culture. On 26th of September 1861, the newspapers announced that their mission was to preserve Hawai‘i cultural heritage and to “represent all the Kānaka Maoli” (Silva, *Aloha Betrayed*, 83 ). Thus, Kānaka Maoli writers reversed the missionaries’ purpose of introducing Hawaiian orthography as a form of control, and, instead they used the written form of their language as a medium to document their mo‘olelo and to resist western hegemonization (ho‘omanawanui 32).<sup>29</sup> While the work of the early Hawaiian missionaries ultimately helped clear the ground for colonization some decades later, their impact left an indelible mark that persists in Kānaka Maoli writings to this day.

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<sup>27</sup> For details on orthography of Hawaiian Language refer to Albert J Schütz. *The Voices of Eden : a History of ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i Studies*. University of Hawaii Press, 1994.

<sup>28</sup> Missionaries used newspapers as a platform to spread Christian beliefs ( Nogelmeier,58). The missionaries believed that publishing Hawaiian-medium newspapers would assist their mission of saving the pagan( Silva, *Aloha Betrayed*).

<sup>29</sup> According to ho‘omanawanui, Kānaka Maoli writings during the 19th century “became a kind of performance, a dance across the pages of journals, manuscripts, and newspapers. Writing represented the fiery voices of Pele and Hi‘iaka, mea kākau (writers) and haku mele (composers), at a time when actual hula and mele were publicly silenced” (*Voices of Fire* 32). Thus, the weaving together of writing, literature, mo‘olelo, and resistance was established by the first Kānaka writers who insisted on their cultural values and practices.

## American Capitalism Intervenes: Obstruction of Kinship Systems

Colonial capitalist culture was further realized through the creation of markets that sold European merchandise to Indigenous peoples, allowing Europeans to infiltrate Indigenous economies. The Reciprocity Treaty between the U.S. and the Kingdom of Hawai'i in 1876 is an early step toward the economic exploitation of Hawai'i because it introduced a new system of consumption. The economic pressure established with the treaty contributed to the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy in 1893 (Beard and Beard, 359-60, Williams Politics 13-25). Thus, traditional Kānaka Maoli labor was affected by the capitalist European system. Keone describes the substantial change before annexation: "Islander men were in demand as local labourers and sailors, while some Islander women entered into domestic service and prostitution. Islanders became increasingly reliant upon European trade items (such as cloth, alcohol, gunpowder, and muskets)" (39). European and American influences created floating Island markets with American goods which developed into an industrial culture that sought to replace Hawaiian culture (Diamond).

Clearly, American opportunistic strategies within Hawai'i created destructive structures. Many of these economic relationships were used by westerners within other nations. Often, colonial powers formed relationships with the heads of tribes. For example, the British manipulated the tribal heads (Shaikh's) in Iraq in the early decades of the twentieth century; westerner colonial powers follow(ed) a similar strategy in forming relationships with Indigenous community leaders. These leaders, who possessed eminent positions in the Pacific social system, were transformed into "capitalists, though this often resulted in heavy foreign debt and increased vulnerability to annexation by Europeans" (Keown 39). Once the leaders of communities were in debt, foreigners began to dismantle Indigenous traditions of kinship. Keown states: "Kinship structures were altered with the increasing numbers of mixed-race children, many of whom

married Europeans and Americans” (39). The change in social and financial systems, which was introduced and caused by different western paradigms, served, and still serve, the colonizer’s plan to manipulate and exploit Kānaka Maoli, their history, and their land.

Death was a significant marker of the colonial presence in Hawai‘i (Diamond [1997]; Archer [2018]). The people of Hawai‘i underwent significant mortality rates beginning in 1778, from various causes through the introduction of foreigners and colonialism. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Indigenous population in Hawai‘i was reduced radically by the introduction of diseases and recruitment efforts that took Kānaka Maoli to work outside their islands.<sup>30</sup> Hence, as Keown states: “A native population of around 142,000 in 1823 was reduced to 39,000 by 1896” (40).<sup>31</sup> Many reports of illnesses and death appear in print during this time. For example, Jack London refers to the effects of leprosy on the Hawaiian people. Some of London’s short stories “feature what he called ‘the inevitable white man’, an embodiment of the putative biological and social ‘superiority’ of white races, and his visit to the Hawaiian leper colony on Moloka‘i in 1906 inspired a range of stories in which leprosy functions as a metaphor for the depredations of colonialism” (Keown 41).<sup>32</sup> (I will discuss this subject in detail in a subsequent section.)

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<sup>30</sup> For more information about Kānaka Maoli health issues under colonization refer to a recent study done by Seth Archer, published in 2018. Archer argues: “The ma‘i malihini (introduced diseases) ... left a deep imprint on island culture and on the Hawaiian national consciousness” (2). He theorizes an ultimate colonial destruction through theorizing a “junction between colonialism, health, and culture” (4). The ma‘i malihini traced back to the times of Captain Cook visits to the Island.

<sup>31</sup> See also: Kuykendall & Day 156; and Archer 1-5.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson also “engaged with Western theories about depopulation in Oceania” (Keown 41). During his travel to the Hawaiian islands, Stevenson “kept a journal ..., using his entries as the basis for his travel book. Hawaiians, and other eastern Polynesians are ‘perishing like flies’” (Keown 42). This kind of literature established a sense of fear inside white visitors of becoming savages like the Polynesian they represented in their writings. This phobia was supported by the scientific research linked to Darwin’s idea of reverse evolution he presented in his book *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871) (Keown 44). The tropes of savagery, disease, sex of the natives and depopulation were part of the literature of colonizer. These are some of the evidences of the colonizer’s genocidal act on Kānaka Maoli. The aim of which is to settle at Hawai‘i by announcing it as terra nullius, or empty space.

Furthermore, tropes of death, disease, savagery, overtly sexualized natives, and “the last native” were used extensively in the literature of the colonizer<sup>33</sup> — and subsequent postcolonial representations. Whether in colonial discourse or in Kānaka Maoli literature, tropes of death bear evidences of the colonizer’s genocidal acts on Kānaka Maoli. The settlers recognized the physical, cultural, and spiritual genocide of the Kānaka Maoli as necessary to facilitate the building of a new culture. One of their strategies was to announce lands as *terra nullius*, or empty space, which further disconnected (or attempted to) Indigenous peoples from their genealogy (land). Physical, emotional, and cultural genocide, by the end of the twentieth century, weighed on Indigenous populations, and suicide became a prominent reason for the death.

### Colonial Literature: Before/During the Annexation of Hawai‘i

As Edward Said discusses in *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*, the colonizer creates his own literature to support his project of ultimate control of all territories. This intention of complete control is applicable to colonizing Polynesia, including Hawai‘i. After British captain Samuel Wallis and his crew voyaged to the Pacific, they produced literature that aided in the construction of imperial western desires. For example, Wallis and his compatriot James Cook wrote extensive literatures about the Pacific during their voyages to Hawai‘i and the Pacific between 1769 and 1779.<sup>34</sup> According to ho‘omanawanui and other Kānaka scholars and activists,

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<sup>33</sup> For details about colonial discourse of blaming Kānaka Maoli for (their own) depopulation, refer to David S. Jones, *Rationalizing Epidemics: Meanings and Uses of American Indian Mortality since 1600* (2005). Also Bushnell’s study *The Gifts of Civilization: Germs and Genocide in Hawai‘i* (1993). Another interesting study made by Seth Archer, a physician, whose article “Remedial Agents: Missionary Physicians and the Depopulation of Hawai‘i” (2010) explores the role of missionary doctors in complicating and misrepresenting Hawaiian plight of the nineteenth century. For earlier colonial representation of this issue check Elkin, W. B. “An Inquiry Into the Causes of the Decrease of the Hawaiian People.” *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 8, no. 3, 1902, pp. 398–411.

<sup>34</sup> For more details on Captain Cook literature check: Campbell (1989), Obeyesekere (1992), Silva (2004), and Chang (2016).

western (American and European) settlers like William Drake Westervelt, Thomas G. Thrum, Abraham Fornander; and visitors like Mark Twain, Jack London, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Padraic Colum collected, translated, and published traditional Hawaiian literature under the genre of folklore and folktales. Their publications were framed in a specifically western perception that denigrated and belittled Hawaiian culture and perspectives (ho‘omanawanui).<sup>35</sup>

The west followed a systemized plan in building a colonial discourse to support its imperial expansion plans. Colonial discourse, according to David Spurr, “designate[s] a space within language that exists both as a series of historical instances and as a series of rhetorical functions” (7). Western colonial discourse includes fiction and non-fiction works by well-known writers. This discourse manipulates the colonized cultural heritage—in this case, the Hawaiian culture— to popularize the narrative about the legitimacy of western conquests.

Literature about Hawai‘i was produced by American writers during the nineteenth century to support the American annexation of Hawai‘i, promoting imperial expansion and capitalistic aspiration in favor of annexing Hawai‘i. Mark Twain’s *Letters from the Sandwich Islands* and Jack London’s *The House of Pride*, two works that contributed to the colonial discourse on Hawai‘i, operate in this framework of imperial expansion. These writers, among many others, generated a colonial relationship to the Island and its native inhabitants in their literature. Developing a colonial relationship to build on and essentialize and manipulate the image of Kānaka Maoli requires narratives of submission, such as Kānaka Maoli hospitality. Commenting on idealization of hospitality and representations in literature, Paul Lyons states: “One might approach postcolonial work by asking how hospitable such work is to indigenous peoples, knowledges, expressive forms, and protocols” (13). Lyons statement underscores how

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<sup>35</sup> See also Cristina Bacchilega’s *Legendary Hawai‘i and the Politics of Place: Tradition, Translation, and Tourism*, to which ku‘ualoha ho‘omanawanui refers.

writers such as Twain and London framed Kānaka Maoli in narratives of white patriarchal supremacy.

Twain used his writing to support Hawai‘i annexation after the death of King Kamehameha V in 1872. Further examples of his interests in the annexation are evidenced in two letters to the editor of the *New York Tribune* in January 1873. The first of those two letter restates some of his previous writings to the *Sacramento Union*, focusing on the climate of the Islands and the culture of its native people. The second letter illustrates the American imperial spirit. In this letter, Twain remarks on the significance of Hawai‘i to the American national economy. He writes:

Now, let us annex the islands. Think how we could build up that whaling trade!...We could make sugar enough there to supply all of America...And then we would own the mightiest volcano on earth —Kilauea!... by annexing, we would get all those 50,000 natives cheap...with their morals and other diseases thrown in....We can make that little bunch of sleepy islands the hottest comer on earth, & array it in the moral splendor of our high & holy civilization. Annexation is what the poor islanders need. (*Mark Twain’s Letters* 572)

Lyons’ concept of hospitality and representation positions Twain’s problematic stance: Kānaka Maoli are inferior to the American Colonizer. Twain clearly argues for Hawai‘i annexation, which supports the colonial mindset in which savages need a white savior. Through his writing, Twain creates a narrative of division; the separation of Kānaka Maoli from their land. Moreover, Twain uses metaphoric language to distance Kānaka Maoli from their culture and land in order to show occupation as the ultimate paradise for white settlers.



Kānaka Maoli land and the culture, according to Twain, are a reciprocal investment in which the exchange is “civilized colonial wisdom” for the savage. Metaphorically, Twain’s “[to] own the mightiest volcano on earth” calls for ultimate commodification of the land and for a subjection of the people’s beliefs and culture. Furthermore, his language “own” and “mightiest” constructs colonial power dynamics that emphasize subjugation, submission, and conquest of all lands and peoples, who thereafter become commodity. Additionally, to “own” in this context signifies the colonizer’s vision of manipulating sacred mo‘olelo because many of the narratives include, or begin with, Mauna Kea.

Another metaphorical angle that colonizers employ, connects Kānaka Maoli morality within a framework of disease (body, mind, and soul). In this paradigm, Kānaka Maoli are morally corrupt because they are savage, thus they need saving (reshaped in white patriarchal images) by the colonizer. Kānaka Maoli are treated as raw material that can be reshaped and remodeled according to the colonial capitalist project. In the savage-savior colonizer relationship, colonial desires exploit the land and its people. Hence, the binary of savage-savior develops a paternalistic relationship, where American capitalistic interests target(ed) the Hawaiian Islands as a resource of sugar, labor, and land.

In a similar manner, Jack London represents Hawai‘i as necessarily annex(able) in his literary works. His short stories and some of his nonfiction writings impacted the colonial approach to annexing Hawai‘i (Cassuto and Reesman). American travel writings, whether fiction or nonfiction, add textuality to the imperial archive and the colonial discourse on Hawai‘i. London’s work on Hawai‘i, write Leonard Cassuto and Jeanne C. Reesman, “Clears the path toward the annexation by imagining Hawaii as sufficiently worthy of American imperial designs” (241). His nonfiction work embeds an appeal for the annexation of Hawai‘i. Moreover,

London's work popularizes the theme of Hawai'i's worthiness of annexation; Hawai'i is worthy of being included on the American political map (386). The focus of his writing is an early attempt to drive tourism; a means of promoting the exotic (and exotic "other" as tamed) culture of Hawai'i. One particular angle London employed in this travel writing mode was his calling attention to surfboarding, as "a Royal Sport."

London continued to build a bridge between hospitality and Kānaka Maoli in order to construct the Islands in the landscape of America. An angle that London used to further advertise Hawai'i as belonging to America was his commodification of leprosy as a vacation destination, and the people with the illness as viewable in the American model of colonization. In an imperial context, empires view the conquered as property. The Board of Health to Molokai (Tayman 184-85) sent London to the island, and he then invited people to visit in writings such as "Lepers of Molokai," published in *Women's Home Companion* in 1916. Thus, the island undergoes a transformation through the lens of white tourism. Where it was once a place of exile for native peoples who suffered from leprosy, under London's gaze it becomes a representation of where, according to him, would within a short timeframe, become a visitors' destination.

London depicts Hawai'i as exotic within the myth of "Manifest Destiny."<sup>36</sup> According to Homi Bhabha, "The construction of the colonial subject in discourse, and the exercise of colonial power through discourse, demands an articulation of forms of difference—racial and sexual" (*The Location of Culture* 67). In the nineteenth century, the western desire to occupy the

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<sup>36</sup> London's characters are framed racially to mark otherness. He also depicts the dilemma of mixed race women living in Hawai'i as in his late tale "On the Makaloa Mat." He states that it is a correct and right "story old Hawaiian life brought to the present tick of the clock of Hawaiian life" (Letters 3: 1553). For example, the story is one told through a conversation about old Hawai'i between Bella and her sister. When Bella reveals her love affair with Prince Liholiho to her sister, her sister becomes anxious because she has feelings for the Prince, too. Prince Liholiho and Bella's affair was stopped because of race and the struggle between modernity and tradition in Hawai'i.

Hawaiian Islands increased becoming a definitive example of expansionism. Westerners began their agenda of occupation by circulating othered mysticism about the place and its people.

Michelle Keown, a postcolonial scholar, refers to the romantic legend of the Pacific as a “heterosexual paradise” popularized by European newspapers. She states:

The journals of Wallis, Bougainville, Cook, Banks, and others all contained observations on the willingness of Tahitian women to engage in sexual relations with European visitors during trade negotiations... These early observations thus established the dominant vision of the Pacific as a heterosexual paradise. (31)

The circulated image of Polynesians as morally promiscuous contributed to the legalization of the invasion of a sovereign country (Hawai‘i) because it appealed to a mass ethos. In this perspective, the colonizer continues his imperialist agenda by imprinting his vision of Hawaiian popular literature for a western audience.

Historically, the American colonial representation of Hawai‘i developed to cope with technology consumption marketing. In the twenty-first century, the settler-colonial represents nā mea Hawai‘i (all things Hawaiian) in its media, films, and video games. Regardless of genre, the colonizer’s depiction of Hawai‘i signals an agenda with its own visions Hawai‘i’s mo‘olelo.

### Power, Land Theft, and the Colonizers’ Desire

Colonizers restructure the concept of ‘āina into land to gain economic, political, and imperial profits. White western patriarchal ideals that found colonial projects seek to possess land in order to amass wealth and power. Thus, “Colonialism conceptually depopulated countries either by acknowledging the native but relegating him or her to the category of the subhuman, or simply by looking through the native and denying his/her existence” (Lawson et al 5). In colonial logic, land is essential for expansion and empire and wealth construction. However, colonizers

eliminate life in path to this ultimate destination (Wolf 2001, O'Brien 2011, Rifkin 2012). Prior to America's illegal occupation of Hawai'i, Europeans practiced these same modes of destruction by killing Native Americans on the American continent, which Philip Fisher argues, "gave a 'clear land' where a 'new world' might be built" (3). A "clear land" works as colonial strategy, manipulating a systematic erasing of the inhabitants and their heritage. The erasure begins through the enforcement methods of separation on sociological and environmental levels. The ultimate goal for colonizers is an empty space wherein western culture and white settlers can expand. The intimate relationship between land, lore, Indigenous people, and the Indigenous belief systems is disturbed by colonial practices and discourse that advocate for rights of control.

Kānaka Maoli experienced, and continue to experience, trauma with the loss of their lands. The trauma inflicted by settler colonialism abuses the land in three phases: "US military occupation of Hawai'i, settler colonialism, and corporate tourism" (Brown "Kanikau *in* Noho Hewa" 374). The physical exploitation of is/land in Hawai'i was accompanied by a systemized colonial representation of the land and its indigenous culture. In colonial discourse, land is "dissimulated by the topic of savagery" (Hulme 3), which creates the othering of Kānaka Maoli. The disjunction between land and Hawaiian culture aims to implant western philosophies of land as commodity instead of Kānaka Maoli views of themselves as protectors of the land. Native Hawaiians considered land to be an ancestor, the colonialists deprived Hawai'i of its cultural value. Native Hawaiians genealogical ties to their land nullify western claims.

While colonization seeks to eradicate culture and Kānaka Maoli ties to the land, Kānaka Maoli, however, acknowledge that land and culture are inextricably connected. Trask contends that Hawaiian poetry and dance are an expression of love for land and environment:

Since the land was an ancestor, no living thing could be foreign. The cosmos, like the natural world, was a universe of familial relations. And human beings were but one constituent link in the larger family....Nature was not objectified but personified, resulting in an extraordinary respect(when compared to Western ideas of nature) for the life of the sea, the heavens, and the earth. Our poetry and dance reveal this great depth of sensual feeling—of love—for the beautiful world we inhabited. (*From a Native Daughter*, 6)

The colonizer manipulates narratives of place and land to create a “tamed” native story, or by systemically constructing organisms of colonization that further marginalize native peoples.

Fanon suggests that land? has an additional ideological value as land connects to living for the colonized: “For a colonized people, the most essential value, because it is the most meaningful, is first and foremost the land: the land, which must provide bread and, naturally, dignity” (9).

The importance of land is not lost on the colonizer or the colonized.

Imperial powers developed new approaches to reconfigure land from sacred and native into commodities for private ownership. Moreover, imperialism sees land within the gaze of the problematic term “paradise.” Through the colonial discourse of an “othered” paradise, Hawai‘i is viewed as a tourist location, and colonial discourse manipulates Kānaka Maoli legends of place into structures of fantasy in which tourists can escape their everyday lives. Through tourism, Hawai‘i became an imaginary world, “a fantasy world more real than reality” (Eco 45).

Bacchilega conceptualizes this discourse as “legendary Hawai‘i,” which she defines as “a space constructed for non-Hawaiians (and especially Americans) to experience, via Hawaiian legends, a Hawai‘i that is exotic and primitive while beautiful and welcoming” (5). Kānaka Maoli legends were used, or reintroduced, under “the domesticating logic of legendary Hawai‘i” (*Legendary Hawai‘i* 153) to create a Hawai‘i fit for consumption by westerners. Hawaiian legends were

marketed as “spooky tales” and “ghost stories,” and stripped of native Hawaiian culture connections. Legends were reframed according to the logic of colonialism (Bacchilega). Thus, “legends,” in this western frame, do not retain the original sense of place and beliefs.

### Aloha ‘Āina: Against the U.S. Navy at the Sacred Island of Kaho‘olawe

Aloha ‘āina as a concept signifies the Kānaka Maoli relationship to ‘āina (land). As a colonized nation, Kānaka Maoli reclaim their land by building their literature with a focus on ‘āina (land). According to Pukui and Elbert “Aloha ‘āina is a very old concept, to judge from the many sayings (perhaps thousands) illustrating deep love of the land” (21). With the introduction of colonial culture to Hawai‘i, the concept of Aloha ‘āina becomes part of the resistance and post-colonial writings. Aloha ‘āina implies an intimate kinship between land, environments and ancestral knowledge. It is a mode of relationships that positions land as a living relative rather than a materialistic space to be owned.

Aloha ‘āina constitutes a core around which various literature of resistance as well as political groups grow. According to Goodyear-Ka’opua, et al.: “Despite global economic and political forces, Kanaka ‘Ōiwi and the people of Hawai‘i continue to organize as agents of change to shape our own destiny in our beloved islands—Ka Pae ‘Āina Hawai‘i” (75). The economic and capitalist modes of relationship of the United States to the islands is originated in an eco-imperialist essence, connected to the exploitation of natural elements of Hawai‘i. ho’omanawanui recognized the literature of resistance on the recent project, the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) on Mauna Kea, as an invocation of “Aloha ‘āina social justice and literary activism” (“A Cairn of Stories” 89).<sup>37</sup> These ongoing debates around value of ‘āina stem from

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<sup>37</sup> For details about the TMT project and the disputes around it, see Steve Miller’s article “Mauna Kea: Two Cultures and the ‘Imiloa Astronomy Center” (2016). Also, refer to Protect Mauna Kea

the differences between the value systems of Kānaka Maoli and the capitalist system of the settler. ho‘omanawanui traces the differences between Kānaka Maoli sentiment to land and the Westerners’:

Hawaiian: ‘āina → food → nurturing/sustaining → value of family land

Haole → real estate/commodity → buying/selling → monetary value

(“This Land Is Your Land” 124) <sup>38</sup>

Hawaiian land and places occupy an important position in Kānaka Maoli resistance tradition in relation to folklore. Since mo‘olelo is a continuous traditional act of creation as well as an act of resistance, mo‘olelo wahi pana (sacred place) grew alongside other forms of political resistance under colonial power. This side-by-side growth echoes the persistence of ancient Hawaiian beliefs connected to certain places that have sacred value. ho‘omanawanui described mo‘olelo wahi pana as:

(local legends, histories, and narratives of place) preserve and allow kupuna knowledge to be passed down—about various locations, some geological and part of the natural environment (such as cliffs, caves, rivers, surf breaks, bays, hills, etc.), as well as those constructed by humans (such as roads, trails, settlements), and other aspects of life in Hawai‘i throughout different time periods. mo‘olelo wahi pana are an integral component of indigenous cartography, mapping the ‘āina (land) and also explaining local phenomena, place (including wind, rain) name origins, and because of this, they are often

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(<http://www.protectmaunakea.org>) and KAHEA, The Hawaiian Environmental Alliance (<http://kahea.org/issues/sacred-summits>).

<sup>38</sup> For a detailed account of the concept of Aloha ‘Āina see ho‘omanawanui, ku‘ualoha. “This Land is Your Land, This Land was My Land: Kānaka Maoli versus Settler Representations of ‘āina in Contemporary Literature of Hawai‘i.” *Asian Settler Colonialism*. Ed. Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Y. Okamura. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2008. 116-154.

etiological. They also incorporate relationships and mo‘okū‘auhau [genealogy] of Kānaka and ‘āina. (“A Cairn of Stories” 71)

While it stems from a deep connection to land and culture, the aim of mo‘olelo wahi pana is to resist and debunk the Western strategy of projecting its (mis)understandings of Hawaiian culture and its disregard of native spiritual values.

A body of mo‘olelo and poetry on the bombing of Kaho‘olawe was one natural response to the colonial armed forces destroying ‘āina with sacred value.<sup>39</sup> Named after “Kohemālamalama O Kanaloa, and known simply Kanaloa, after the Hawaiian and Polynesian god of the ocean currents and navigation” and known also as “Kaho‘olawe” (Blackford 30, Britannica Online Academic Edition), the smallest among the islands of Hawai‘i, fell under U.S. Navy control in 1941, at the start of the U.S.’s involvement in World War 2. Kaho‘olawe is part of the Kānaka Maoli mo‘olelo. Mansel G Blackford affirms that Kaho‘olawe is treated as “a *wahi pana* (sacred place) by ancient Hawaiians and is so considered by many native Hawaiians today” (30). Being a wahi pana stems from bearing connection to the Hawaiian story of creation. Kaho‘olawe was the home of Pele’s brother who is the shark god (Blackford 30). Furthermore, according to the Hawaiian myth of creation, Kaho‘olawe was “born of the union of Papa, earth mother, and Wakea, sky father” (Blackford 30). This sacred island underwent brutal exploitation by the American military for decades, as it served as a bombing range and testing site for warheads.<sup>40</sup> This literal annihilation of wahi pana serves historically as possibly the most egregious colonial and military act of disregard for nā mea Hawai‘i.

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<sup>39</sup> According to Doreen Massey, “What gives a place its specificity is not some long internalized history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of relations, articulated, together at a particular locus” (Massey 66). Thus, Kaho‘olawe position to Kānaka Maoli is not accidental but rather a representation and a manifestation of Aloha ‘Āina.

<sup>40</sup> Kaho‘olawe was declared a bombing range for the US Navy after the Japanese attack on the Pearl Harbor (Aluli and Daviana Pōmaika'i McGregor, Keene ). Hence, the sacred Island was used as a field to experiment, to develop, and to test US bombs. The most infamous bomb experiment was conducted in



Resisting the bombing of Kaho‘olawe entailed political defiance that draws upon Hawaiian mo‘olelo. Kānaka Maoli activists, educators, and scholars, driven by aloha ‘āina, resisted this violation through different venues, for example, by forming organizations and campaigns that took actions against US Navy control over the Island. One of these organizations is Protect Kaho‘olawe ‘Ohana (PKO), which was started by a group of culture-preserving Kānaka Maoli in 1976.<sup>41</sup> Mo‘olelo wahi pana around Kaho‘olawe encompass voyages like those of the Kānaka Maoli ancestors thousands of years ago. In 1984, a Kānaka Maoli (aged sixty five), Harry Mitchell rode dangerous waves with his surfboard to Kaho‘olawe from his homeland, Maui, during the night. This act by kūpuna was meant to inspire the younger generation, and instill in them the love for this ‘āina (Blackford 50-51).

Ten years later, activism for Kaho‘olawe had grown, and the island’s plight was a major point of resistance. Davianna McGregor a member of PKO, a scholar who is against western policy of land seizing in Hawai‘i, celebrates the historical value of Kaho‘olawe island after regaining the island from the US forces in 1994: “You can get a feel on Kaho‘olawe of what it was like to live on Hawaii at the time of our ancestors” ( qtd in Reyes 1 ). McGregor also links place to ancestral and historical traditions: “It’s important for us to have a place where we can practice our traditions without it being a spectacle, without it being some kind of tourist attraction” (qtd in Reyes 1). McGregor emphasizes the importance of a capitalist-free ‘āina. The plight of Kaho‘olawe, and the response, acts as a form of resistance which draws from mo‘olelo, signifying that new mo‘olelo are created by such resistance.

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1965 by dropping tons of TNT. This attack not only destroyed the historical heritage of the island, but also violated Kānaka Maoli beliefs.

<sup>41</sup> There are other movements and campaigns against the destruction made to Kaho‘olawe. One of them Kaho‘olawe Campaign which is started in 1994. Kaho‘olawe Campaign coincided with the publication of the Pacific journal Mānoa in celebration of the regaining of Kaho‘olawe (Keown 95-6).

Kānaka Maoli view the “environment” as a connected whole that includes human beings. They see the universe as a complex whole of family members whose fundamental mission is to take care of each other.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, the United States’ military interventions<sup>43</sup> in Hawai‘i provoked popular resistance, which Kānaka Maoli popular stories reflects, as well as in their written literature.<sup>44</sup> Since the 1970s, Kānaka Maoli writing increased vastly, establishing a corpus of anti-colonial discourse written in English or pidgin but framed by Hawaiian literary traditions and styles. The main focus of the Kānaka Maoli intellectuals of the early literature-as-resistance movement such as Gavan Daws, Dana Naone Hall, Joseph J Balaz, and Wayne Kaumuali‘i Westlake, was developing and refining local literature aesthetics, and refuting the colonizer’s myths about the islanders (Keown 109). Anti-colonial literature condemns the US impact on Hawai‘i and its people. For example, “Mālama: Hawaiian Land and Water” was produced as a special issue of *Bamboo Ridge* edited by Dana Naone Hall in 1985. This issue focuses on the natural resources and environment violated by colonization.

### Subverting Western Negligence of Kānaka Maoli Literature

In addition to possessing lands, western colonial powers also renamed/remapped places and spaces, attempting to write over original native names. Moreover, colonial literature

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<sup>42</sup> For more discussions of land in connection to Hawai‘i genealogical system, see articles by Haunani-Kay Trask, Mililani Trask, Momiala Kamahale, ku‘ualoha ho‘omanawanui, Healani Sonoda, and Kapulani Landgraf in *Asian Settler Colonialism: From Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life in Hawaii*, edited by Jonathan Y. Okamura, and Candace Fujikane, University of Hawaii Press, 2008.

<sup>43</sup> The United States’ presence in Hawai‘i was solidified in 1898 during the war between the Americans and the Spanish. Keown demonstrates that “nearly thirty percent of the land on O‘ahu, the most populous island on which Hawaii’s capital Honolulu is located, is still controlled by the US military” (94). Military activities are an advanced feature of colonization.

<sup>44</sup> Wahi pana, means “legendary place.” In Hawai‘i system of beliefs, places with wahi pana bear special value that persist through colonization. Places with spiritual value appear in the Hawaiian cultural production as signs of the indigenous awareness about the valuation of their historical and cultural heritage. Thus, the bombing of the island of Kaho‘olawe inaugurates such a condemnation by writers and activists.

continues to remap, or erase, the original naming of places. However, Kānaka Maoli writers regenerate a tradition by re-voicing and re-positioning place and place names in their literature. According to Bacchilega, “Hawaiians have suffered a number of losses that compound their loss of sovereignty over land and nation: specific knowledge of places, connections with them, sustenance from them, as well as opportunities for sustained public dialogue about their traditions” (43). The resistance to the colonial manipulation of Hawaiian folklore comes up as a counter discourse with the focus on ancestors, land, and language. The proverb, “I ka ‘ōlelo no ke ola, i ka ‘ōlelo nō ka make” (In the language is life. In the language is death) represents the importance of oral and the written communication for Kānaka Maoli. Kupuna (ancestors) are at the core of the discourse that contends that savages did not resist colonization.

Although Kānaka Maoli have re/written their literature—as well as some translations from world literature—for more than two centuries, little attention was paid to their literature even by the end of the twentieth century (ho’omanawanui, “Foundation of Hawaiian Literature” 50). Until the end of the twentieth century, the Department of English at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa did not focus on Hawaiian literature as part of World literature (ho’omanawanui, “Foundation of Hawaiian Literature” 51). This lack of focus underscores how colonial powers worked to eradicate Hawaiian knowledge.

ho’omanawanui,<sup>45</sup> as well as other Kānaka Maoli scholars, recognize the absence of Indigenous literature as an academic discipline in the university curriculum, which connects with the North American academic system. She contends that mo‘olelo is a cultural production that “helps us understand the past as it influences the present, and to better see how it interprets and

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<sup>45</sup> Dr. ku‘ualoha ho’omanawanui was the first Kānaka Maoli professor hired to the English Department at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. Currently, Joyce Pua Warren, No‘u Revilla, and Kristiana Kahakauwila were hired to the English Department at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (2019).

reflects human experience within a cultural context and across time” (“Foundation of Hawaiian Literature” 52). She relates the issue of the absence of Indigenous literature (mo‘olelo) in the university curriculum to the issue of translation. The rich and dense body of Kānaka Maoli literature in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i is not only of historical value to the people and the land of Hawai‘i, but it is also a testimony to the systematic effort to eradicate a whole human civilization by colonial and hegemonic powers. Mo‘olelo were directly affected by what was effectively the banning of “‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i in the schools in 1896. Hence, an earlier form of resistance appeared in efforts of Kānaka Maoli journalists and scholars directly after the introduction of writing system. Though not a direct condemnation of colonization, the Kānaka Maoli initiated their own journals, which documented their oral mo‘olelo, beginning in the 19th century. ho‘omanawanui connects the problem of invisibility to the writing of these texts in the ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i which was banned for decades.

On another level, the scarcity of Kānaka Maoli mo‘olelo representation in the academy attests to the impact of the erasure of ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i in the education of the new generation of Kānaka Maoli who are illiterate in ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i. The lack of mo‘olelo in academic spaces creates cultural dissonance for Kānaka Maoli. Cultural dissonance signifies the imbalance that occurs in class environments when local students’ cultural backgrounds collide with the hegemonic academic culture, which may cause a sense of confusion and discomfort (Kuh and Love, 2000; Museus and Quaye, 2009). This imbalance is one of the many facets of colonial power that dehumanize the colonized people.

This disconnect between natives and native intelligence is an effect of the colonizer’s attempts to create “new men” by disconnecting them from the culture of their ancestors. This act of creating a new man facilitates the assimilation of the colonized to the hegemonic culture of the

colonizer through the disapprobation of their own culture. Fanon states: “Every effort is made [by the colonizer] to make the colonized confess the inferiority of their culture” (*Wretched of the Earth* 171). Western imperial power employed this agenda in their occupation of Hawai‘i. Thus, they banned the language, spiritually disconnecting Kānaka Maoli from their forefathers and their mo‘olelo. Noenoe Silva argues:

The mo‘olelo, as originally written, in all their length and complexity, have been made absent, not only through such translations, but as a direct result of the colonization of Hawai‘i by the United States; colonizers usually impose their own language on the colonized, and, in the case of Hawai‘i, as it is for so many indigenous peoples, the language itself has been very nearly exterminated. Most Kānaka Maoli cannot read these mo‘olelo that were written by their own ancestors. (159)

Silva recognizes the difficulties of reclaiming these stories because of the changes, even in how the world is conceived, by the use of English in Hawai‘i. However, America “couldn’t create a new man” from Kānaka Maoli, according to Trask. “Hawaiians,” she announces, “We are not Americans. Nor are we Europeans, or Asians” (vi). Regaining the national and cultural heritage which was written in ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i during the nineteenth century, through translation has become a common path of the “new” men and women of Hawai‘i who reject and fight settler colonialism through scholarship, writing, protests, and political actions.

Postcolonial literature produced by Kānaka Maoli writers, though aesthetic in nature, is coded with meaning that challenges colonial discourse. Mona Baker, like many Kānaka Maoli postcolonial writers, argues that “undermining existing patterns of domination requires not only concrete forms of activism (such as demonstrations, sit-ins, and civil disobedience), but must involve a direct challenge to the stories that sustain these patterns” (6). Baker, Trask, Bacchilega,

and ho'omanawanui, and many Kānaka Maoli, raise three main points that challenge western systems of domination: first, translation; second, usage of language techniques in writing that rely on 'Ōlelo Hawai'i; and third, transformation of culturally coded Hawaiian words into distinguished poetic tools charged with beauty and politics. Translation from and into English, accordingly, is fundamental to rebuilding spiritual connection to Hawaiian-ness. This tradition of translation by 'Ōlelo Hawai'i-speaking scholars whose translations into 'Ōlelo Hawai'i include foreign folklore like the *Arabian Nights* and the Grimm's fairy-tale collection. Translation also reorients western hegemonic discourse that work against the colonizer's myth of saving the "savage" by creating new modes of resistance.

With the annexation of Hawai'i in 1898, 'Ōlelo Hawai'i was banned from schools and government for decades, from 1892-1978.<sup>46</sup> In the 1970s, resistance movements in Hawai'i succeeded in reintroducing 'Ōlelo Hawai'i to schools. Weaving 'Ōlelo Hawai'i with English signifies resistance. Code-switching, which is defined as "alternation between two languages within the same space, sentence, or utterance" (Keown 151), allows this form of resistance to uncover spaces of power. Kānaka Maoli use code-switching to carry ancestral beliefs and connection to mo'olelo. In her introduction to Trask's collection of poetry *Light in the Crevice Never Seen*, Eleanor Wilner comments: "The Hawaiian words both affect the English sound system, and, in their scattered presence, their appearance as linguistic bits rather than /full sentences, they remind us of the history that dismembered this culture and its tongue" (xxiv). However, some Kānaka Maoli poets invoke 'Ōlelo Hawai'i without providing a translation to re-

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<sup>46</sup>Article X, Section 4 of the Constitutional Convention created by the Office of Hawaiian Affairs in 1978 set Hawaiian culture as an essential part of Hawaiian education. Thus, the State shall provide for a Hawaiian education program consisting of language, culture and history in the public schools. The use of community expertise shall be encouraged as a suitable and essential means in furtherance of the Hawaiian education program " (Lee 158). For details about the history and the value of Hawaiian language refer to Schütz (1996), Silva (2004, 2017).

order power dynamics in language production, rhetorically arguing that ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i is the language of the land.<sup>47</sup>

## Politics in Poetics: The Recognition of Ancestors in Contemporary Compositions

Kānaka Maoli methods of resistance through writing are a mixture of scholarship, essays, drama, fiction, nonfiction, and written and oral poetry, to name a few. Kānaka Maoli creative writing is political in nature. Trask states: “Life is a confluence of creativities: art is a fluid political medium, as politics is metaphorical and artistic” (“Writing in Captivity”18). The embedded politics of literature function as a means to overturn western colonial systems. According to Bacchilega: “A re-cognition of Hawai‘i’s stories in and of translation that attends to and respects indigenous senses of place, genre, and history” (*Legendary Hawai‘i* 138–40) can help to recover and revalue how Kānaka Maoli folklore contributes to resistance discourse.<sup>48</sup>

Re-positioning history through imaginative reconstruction of silenced stories by Kānaka Maoli is crucial to continued decolonization methods. Most of Hawaiian scholarship and literature celebrates and alludes to the mele and mo‘olelo of Kūpuna. These narratives were most often passed down orally (pre-colonial and colonial), and they use legends to emphasize Kānaka Maoli knowledge. An awareness of Kānaka Maoli history and knowledge for and from Kānaka Maoli is imperative to combat colonial narratives that reduce native stories to their merest forms. For instance, Lani Cupchoy, a Kānaka Maoli diaspora researcher, reconstructed the legend of Kānaka Maoli warrior woman, Chiefess Manono. Chiefess Manono’s life story was grossly

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<sup>47</sup> Some Kānaka Maoli writers provide glossary by the end of their books to help readers comprehend their message and to facilitate learning about their culture. In all cases, Kānaka Maoli are determined to bring their language to the status of visibility as an act of resistance.

<sup>48</sup> Colonial Hawai‘i shows the nonverbal representations, corresponding to modern trend of interest on visual Art. Bacchilega discusses how works like Landgraf’s volume of landscape photographs *Nā Wahi Pana o Ko‘olau Poko*, published in 1994, contributed to decolonial discourse. I argue that Landgraf’s work is decolonizing!

simplified in western texts, defining her as a woman warrior who died for traditional Hawaiian religion rather than connecting her to Kānaka Maoli stories of her deeds and life. Cupchoy's reconstruction of the story becomes a technique she calls "conscientious reconstruction" (37). Hence, some Kānaka Maoli writers adopt the technique of "conscientious reconstruction" to retell their histories as protest against enforced stories.<sup>49</sup>

## Recalling the Voices of Ancestors: Decolonization and Kānaka Maoli Writing Traditions

Kānaka Maoli resistance begins as early as the first western contact. American literature of colonialism worked to silence the native's rejection of colonization by revisioning the history of Hawai'i as one without resistance. The rediscovery and reinvigoration of kūpuna stories and hi/stories of resistance became fundamental in refuting colonial narratives.<sup>50</sup> Fanon writes:

we must shed the habit of decrying the efforts of our forefathers or feigning incomprehension at their silence or passiveness. They fought as best they could with the weapons they possessed at the time, and if their struggle did not

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<sup>49</sup> Reconstructing hi/stories includes trails and police documents. For example, the reconstruction of Massie-Kahahawai case (1932) by John P Rosa, published 2014. Massie-Kahahawai case took place in Hawai'i with the killing of Joseph "Kalani" Kahahawai after being accused, with four other youths, of raping Massie, wife of an American lieutenant in the Navy. Rosa believes that there is objective reality. Hence, he considers the relationship between oral histories and written sources, between "official" histories and popular, collective memories" (78) to reconstruct the story of Kahahawai. Rosa also confirm the role of Kānaka Maoli collective memory and oral history. He reconstruction this case by taking into consideration different modes of popular culture whether fictional or oral histories. He also links the brutal death of with a north American case known as Scottsboro case, in which nine African American young men were accused of raping a white woman six months prior to the Massie case (1).

<sup>50</sup> Professor Noenoe Silva debunks the Western story of the passivity of Kānaka Maoli in actively defying annexation of Hawai'i in 1898. Silva released a lost document of petitions against the annexation of Hawai'i signed by over 21,000 published in her book *Aloha Betrayed* and "Kānaka Maoli Resistance to Annexation".



reverberate throughout the international arena, the reason should be attributed not so much to a lack. (145-146)

Kānaka Maoli intellectuals rely on kūpuna beliefs and actions as a distinctive feature of their discourse. These connections to a rich intellectual Kānaka Maoli history and forms of resistance to white hegemony were initiated by Kānaka Maoli leaders, such as Queen Lili‘uokalani. Queen Lili‘uokalani’s writings emphasize her persuasive opposition to western colonization. For instance, Queen Lili‘uokalani’s autobiography, *Hawaii's Story by Hawaii's Queen*, and her translation of the Hawaiian cosmogonic chant *Kumulipo* remind generations of her people about the traditional mores that colonization tried to erase. Her writings speak of justice for Hawaiian causes; they speak to future generations of Kānaka Maoli, creating an avenue of knowledge for her people to know their ancestors’ struggles to preserve their “homeland in the face of overwhelming violence and to offer fuel for the continuing fire of Hawaiian nationhood” (Heath 122). Resistance only exists through its own history from the voices of the people.

The re-invigoration of ancestors is not confined to the demystification of western representations and myths about Kānaka Maoli. The voice of ancestors echoes and evolves in contemporary writings by Kānaka Maoli, permitting agency and a resurgence of traditional poetic structures. In addition, specific culturally-based tropes emerge from the language and poetic techniques embedded in native orature. Meiwi, for instance, are “poetic devices that demonstrate intellectual and aesthetic traditions that bridge oral performance and literature” (ho ‘omanawanui, *Voices of Fire* 204) that signify an awareness of kūpuna mo‘olelo techniques. Meiwi, ho ‘omanawanui advises, “bridges the gap between the oral and the written ‘ōlelo” and are “integral to Kānaka Maoli poetics” (*Voices of Fire* 204). Meiwi are significant because they show Kānaka Maoli capability of weaving mo‘olelo with political causes, creating a resistance in

an aesthetic form. This process of transforming memory of ancestral beliefs and structures into ka palapala (writing), and charging it with political themes signifies persistence through mo‘olelo<sup>51</sup>; it is a present built of/from the past, enacted in a relationship between ancestors and their descendants. Sage Takehiro’s poem “Kumulipo Remix” signals a recognition of ancestors’ stories and meiwī.

Takehiro applies traditional poetic techniques and refers to mo‘olelo to deepen her connection to Hawaiians (past and present) in order to glorify the presence of Kānaka Maoli as a recognition of culture. The title of the poem, “Kumulipo Remix,” serves two purposes: first, Kumulipo refers to the Hawaiian epic creation chant; second, the title reflects a form of juxtaposition between Kānaka Maoli mo‘olelo and western methods of re-creating older musical forms. Hence, the title heralds undercurrents of reconstructing, reshaping, and recreating the Kānaka Maoli chant of creation. However, close reading of the poem indicates a mocking tone aimed squarely at western violation of mo‘olelo. “Kumulipo,”<sup>52</sup> as a mo‘olelo includes several mo‘o, songs, and stories about Pele and her sister, Hi‘iaka, and momentous aspects of Kānaka Maoli culture; it is shaped and guided by the genealogy and origin of the land and Kānaka Maoli. Takehiro draws from this mo‘olelo as well as traditional Kānaka Maoli poetic structures to affirm her indigeneity, at the same time marking the western intervention as a deformation of her people’s literature.

Takehiro relies on specific traditional Kānaka Maoli poetic techniques. One of these techniques is visualizing the poem as an organic creation by drawing upon “Kumulipo”:

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<sup>51</sup> For example, the use of “meiwī mo‘okalāleo,” which is defined as the “traditional mele (poetry, chant, song) and mo‘olelo (narratives, history, stories) that come down to the present mai ka pō mai (from the ancient past), mai nā kūpuna mai (from the ancestors)” (ho‘omanawanui, “Poetic Devices” 1).

<sup>52</sup> For details about “Kumulipo” in the relation to Kānaka Maoli poetry, refer to ho‘omanawanui’s essay “He Lei Ho‘oheno no nā Kau a Kau: Language, Performance, and Form in Hawaiian Poetry.” See, specifically, her section “Mai ka Pā mai: Cosmic, Godly and Poetic Origins” (36-40).

Born is everything from the dark  
 and the slime, where another world  
 swirls words to life with a tongue  
 lungs suck the breath of an ocean. (Takehiro 38)

Takehiro envisions future generations of Kānaka Maoli who will inherit the words of the ancestors, and their history. “Kumulipo Remix” attempts to transform and reorient Kānaka Maoli mo‘olelo. Thus, Takehiro’s poem represents one aspect of merging mo‘olelo and contemporary Kānaka Maoli poetics with politics of resistance.

### Modern Kānaka Maoli Resistance Literature

Dana Naone Hall’s poem “Hawai‘i 89” exemplifies one of the numerous texts that capture the Island’s environment. She compares Hawai‘i under colonization and the traditional lifestyles of Kānaka Maoli. Hall shows an unwavering faith in the traditional teachings of Kūpuna regarding the power of the land. Hall envisions the presence of the goddess in nature. She applies a Hawaiian literary technique known as Kaona in her poetry. Kaona means “hidden meaning, as in Hawaiian poetry; concealed reference, as to a person, thing or place; [and] words with double meanings” (Pukui and Elbert 130). The use of this technique signifies the persistence of Hawaiian mana<sup>53</sup> and sacred beliefs since, arguing that there is still life in the lands. The land in a western context is seen as a non-living entity, but Hall asserts that, to Kānaka Maoli, the land and its inhabitants, human and non-human, all carry mana—everything is connected. Furthermore, even in death, the kūpuna live on:

All night, Kānehekili (god of thunder

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<sup>53</sup> For details about the concept of mana in Hawaiian culture see Noenoe K. Silva’s article “Mana Hawai‘i: An Examination of Political Uses of the Word Mana in Hawaiian” (2016).

flashes in the sky  
 and Moanonuikalehua changes  
 from a beautiful woman  
 into a lehua tree  
 at the sound of the pahu  
 It's true that the man  
 who swam with the sharks  
 and kept them away  
 from the nets full of fish  
 by feeding them limu kala  
 is gone, but we're still here  
 like the fragrant white koki o  
 blooming on the long branch  
 like the hairy leafed nehe  
     clinging to the dry pu'u  
     like the moon high over Ha'ik ū  
 lightening the way home. (Hall 75-76)

The poem's title situates/signals a present day reality. However, Hall also denotes a bridge between present and past, descendent and ancestor, focusing on the changes to her ancestors' land. Thus, destruction reached the land, the plants, and Kānaka Maoli. The graveyard of immigrants and sugar cane plantations resides at lo'i kalo (taro pond fields). New neighborhoods took the place of traditional Pili-grass hale (houses thatched with pili grass). These developments, however, do not limit the poet's vision of "gods and goddesses walk[ing] the

earth.” Writing at the end of the twentieth century, Hall’s unwavering belief in Hawaiian culture— mainly the presence of gods and spirits— signifies an aspect of resistance. She denounces the colonizers hegemonic knowledge implanted by western missionaries; instead calling on older Hawaiian gods.<sup>54</sup>

The language employed by poets and writers venerates the ancestors, land, and ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i. Kānaka Maoli writers see their writing as resistance to the annihilation of their ancestors, and a responsibility toward their land and people. Kau‘i Goodhue, a Hawaiian writer links the act of writing to the past and the future. He states:

Hawaiians say “haweo” to refer to a glow of light that makes things visible. It is in the light of knowledge that the darkness and confusion of the past ... are now being destroyed and the heroic deeds of our ancestors are being revealed. The responsibility is now ours to carry on where they left off. From resistance to affirmation, WE ARE WHO WE WERE. ( Goodhue 39)

Contemporary Kānaka Maoli intellectuals’ writing can be traced to nineteenth century Kānaka Maoli writers who wrote against colonization. Hawaiian lo no‘eau (proverb), “I ka o lelo no ke ola, i ka ‘ o lelo no ka make,” which is translated by Hawaiian scholar Mary Kawena Pukui as “Life is in speech, death is in speech” reflects the significance of speech and language in Hawaiian culture. Writing is resistance from language death. Albert Wendt writes in ‘Towards a New Oceania’ (1976) “Self-expression is a prerequisite of self-respect.” In language, culture, worldviews, and identity forms.

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<sup>54</sup> For more information about the presence of gods in nature and their relationship to humans see Hale‘ole, S. N., and Beckwith, Martha Warren. *Ka Mo‘olelo o Lā‘ieikawai: The Hawaiian Romance of Lā‘ieikawai*. 1st ed., First People's Productions, 1997.

## Feminist Voices in Kānaka Maoli Resistance Literature

Of all the contemporary Kānaka Maoli resistance writers, perhaps none is better known and has a larger body of work today than Haunani-Kay Trask. As a Kānaka Maoli feminist, Trask resisted the westernized image of the hyper-sexualized and exotic Hawaiian female by reestablishing the traditional Hawaiian cultural position of women, which is linked to the Hawaiian gods' power. Trask represents this vision in her poetry and writings. In her book *Eros and Power: The Promise of Feminist Theory*, she states that “it is through a radical exploration of women's hidden body—the body of flesh and feeling, the body of insight and imagination, the body of material and symbolic reality—that contemporary feminists have come to define the causes of women's subordination to men” (Trask, *Eros and Power* 2). Lilikalā Kame‘eleihiwa argues that Hawaiian females are agents of the persistence of ancestral inspiration. She states: “As Hawaiian women, we are the intellectual as well as the physical descendants of our female ancestors, and in turn we will be ancestral inspiration for the generations to come” (1). This complexity of identity and power in the female body is centered in the work of Trask and others; often as a radical exploration of the female body, which appears frequently as a trope in her poems. Trask continues the lineage of feminist Hawaiian literature that started more than 100 years ago with Kānaka Maoli mana wāhine ancestors.

The Kānaka Maoli scholar and writer Emma Ka‘ili- kapuolono Metcalf Beckley Nakuina (1847–929) built a lineage of resistance through her writing. Being born to American businessman Theophilus Metcalf Nakuina allowed her an education in the best academies. She was educated at Punahou School, Sacred Hearts Academy (both in Honolulu), and Mills Seminary in California (ho‘omanawanui, *Voices of Fire* 100). Nakuina adhered to her Hawaiian-ness through her mother, Ka‘ilikapuolono of Kūkaniloko, O‘ahu (ho‘omanawanui, *Voices of Fire* 100). ho‘omanawanui identifies Nakuina as the only ‘Ōiwi female writer who published

extensively in English at that period (Voices of Fire 100). She was a mana wāhine who wrote extensively against colonialism. She carried her ancestors' words forward to overturn and subvert white western power systems. Contemporary mana wāhine scholars and writers point to her as a founding voice in resisting American imperialism.

## Art Informs Cultural Studies: Cultural Studies Informs Art

Hawaiian researchers, academics, and activists continually negotiate and identify methods of resistance such as code switching and feminist theory to advance 'Ōlelo Hawai'i. Kānaka Maoli poet and scholar Brandy Nālani McDougall uses 'Ōlelo Hawai'i words in her collection of poems *The Salt Wind (Ka Makani Pa'akai)* (2008) without defining their meaning in English, leaving the audience to navigate her poems, and do the work of reading deeply. McDougall, through the use of Hawaiian words, asserts political agency against American settler colonization by advocating a resistance discourse that does not rely on English translation. In effect, McDougall rhetoric signals the value and cultural heritage carried in/on 'Ōlelo Hawai'i with her refusal to provide translation. She is saying 'Ōlelo Hawai'i is the language of the land—not less than English, but fully and wholly functioning in its whole in the present. She is determined to regain and rebuild Hawaiian cultural identity through poetry and 'Ōlelo Hawai'i. The poems in *The Salt Wind* reflect indigenous historical, political and cultural sensibility in the context of the continued colonial occupation of Hawai'i. McDougall expresses her anger about the destruction that the colonizer brought, and relies on the legends of her ancestors for her poetry.

By reinforcing 'Ōlelo Hawai'i as the salient means of communication in Hawai'i, Kānaka Maoli authors seek to restore and rebuild their ancestors' culture and language while creating new culture for future generations. Their use of language argues of a future built beyond colonial

landscapes, beyond the imprisonment of ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i, and away from only colonial narratives of what it means to be Hawaiian. McDougall employs code-switching in her collection of poetry to do more than reflect on and resist settler-colonialism. She deepens her sense of resistance by recognizing and drawing upon Kānaka Maoli poetic forms and cultural beliefs to build a Hawaiian-ness that rejects colonial modes of identification, commodification, and being. Her poem “Ka ‘Ōlelo” underscores Kānaka Maoli poetic skills, recognizing the value of ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i on and in Kānaka Maoli. ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i on the tongues of Kānaka Maoli in poetry is full and rich, casting away westernized “othered-ness.” McDougall’s poem Ka ‘Ōlelo” consists of five sonnets that are connected by themes of appreciation and lamentation of ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i.

In “Ka ‘Ōlelo,” McDougall shows the importance of reclaiming ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i. This reclamation requires action. Kānaka Maoli, she writes: “Stir the darkness around you/ and bring forth the light—E ala ē!” (*The Salt-Wind: Ka Makani Pa ‘akai* 6). In this poem, McDougall suggests that regaining ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i requires nurturing “newly born words” (66). She urges Kānaka Maoli to take part in the resurrection of ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i:

...our ‘Ōlelo like pōhaku [stone],  
 learned to live with the cold, dark fruit under  
 our tongues. This is our legacy—words strewn  
 among wana spines in the long record  
 the sand has kept within its grains, closer  
 to reclaiming our shells, now grown thicker. (*The Salt-Wind* 67)

Here, the “word,” used to refer to ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i, becomes a vehicle of resistance to the colonial powers rigorous attempts to silence the ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i. It is “closer,” to reclaiming language and words that carry the culture of Kānaka Maoli. ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i is connected, to ‘āina, and the



English language “could never replace the land’s unfolding song, nor the ocean’s ancient oli, giving us use again” (*The Salt-Wind*, 66). McDougall’s desire for ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i proclaims a harmony and a bond between the Hawaiian and environment. She says:

Think of all the old words that have succumbed,  
 their kaona thrown oceanward for English  
 words we use like nets to catch the full sum  
 of our being, finding too little fish... (*The Salt-Wind* 69)

McDougall suggests, in “Ka ‘Ōlelo,” that reclaiming ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i is not an easy task. Poetically, she connects ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i with images of Hawaiian environment to build world’s, oceans, and landscapes of Hawaiian language. ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i, in spite of the colonial disremembering, is in the process of re-invigoration—the growth of ‘ape shoot “whose delicate shoots/ shoot forth their young sprouts, and spread, and bring forth/ in their birth, many branches find their roots” (*The Salt-Wind* 70). The words which constitute the language may grow and spread like the ‘ape shoots.

Additionally, McDougall links language to familial genealogy. She searches for her own genealogy: “E aloha. ‘O wai kou inoa?” (70). The answer comes from her Grandfather who greets her “Pehea ‘oe?” (70). In this sense, ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i implies a connection to ancestors and to land. In her ‘ōlelo no‘eau: “We know; E ho‘oulu ana kākou” (70), meaning forms through this connection. Ending the sequence of poems on ‘ōlelo with a traditional and place-based ‘ōlelo no‘eau, as a meiwī mele, is significant to my thesis of resisting colonization by drawing upon folklore. McDougall protests the colonial dismantling of the Hawaiian tongue through her use of ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i to advocate authorship by relying on Kānaka Maoli environmental images.

In writing about Kānaka Maoli in her own art, Trask explicitly draw the importance of land, place, and culture to her people in order to critique the violence conducted by settler colonialism. She states: “[Native Hawaiians are] an ancient people who have learned to live in and with our place and whose culture is the least destructive and the most beneficial to the land” (From A Native 70). The Western touristic projection of Hawai‘i violated Hawaiian land and ocean. Waters, as a fundamental part of the Hawaiian environment and an essential source of knowledge, is now polluted by tourist industry:

all those 5 gallon

toilets flushing

away tourist waste

into our waters

Waikīkī home

of ali‘i

sewer center

of Hawai‘i (*Light in the Crevice* 60)

The traditional place of ali‘i becomes a “rendezvous for pimps/Hong Kong hoodlums/ Japanese capitalists/ haole punkers” (60). This lamentation is followed by a helu (list)<sup>55</sup> of what colonialism brought to Hawai‘i. Trask lists, ironically, “the gifts of the industrial to the primitive island people”:

Condo units

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<sup>55</sup> Helu is a meiwi mele. ho‘omanawanui describe helu as “Recounting of knowledge, similar things, events, etc. in a narrative; mo‘okū‘auhau (genealogy) can also be presented as a helu.” For a complete description of helu as poetic device, refer to ho‘omanawanui “Meiwi Mele: Kanaka Maoli Poetic Devices & Strategies” (2).

of disease

Drug traffic

Child porn

AIDS herpes

old fashioned

syphilis

gangland murder (*Light in the Crevice* 60)

The historical assertion here is bold, implying a multitude of destructive “gifts.” Thus, Waikīkī, under the American occupation, is viewed sarcastically by the author. Trask lists some of the outcomes of colonialism in connection to tourism. Waikīkī, Trask writes, is an “exemplar / of Western ingenuity/ standing guard against/ the sex life/ of savages/ the onslaught of barbarian” (*Light in the Crevice* 61). The commodification of Hawaiian bodies through hiring as trained Hula dancers is contradictory to the announced mission of the westerner. Furthermore, Trask argues that those who are employed in Waikīkī area participate in what she calls “cultural prostitution” (*From a Native Daughter* 137). That is, the selling of the land which she envisions as a woman. For this claim, she invites Hawaiians not to take part in commercializing their land: “For the sake of our loved ones, our families, our elders, and our relatives, we participate in the wage system because we feel there is no other way” (138). Thus, she prioritizes Kānaka Maoli’s agency in anti-colonial struggle.

Trask addresses this issue in her poem “Sovereignty.” She criticizes those who participated in supporting the western government, establishing a straightforward discourse of resistance by employing Hawaiian mo‘olelo to critique the natives who cooperate with the colonizer. In the first section of “Sovereignty,” she links a volcano to a woman’s body in terms

of bearing life: “No shadow falls across those volcanic labia of fern and spongy cliff” (25).

Native Hawaiians believe that Pele, the goddess of volcanoes and fire, is the source of the islands of Hawai‘i. Pele, the sacred female deity signifies the Kānaka Maoli belief in the strength of women and their role in bearing life. The representation of this belief in literature becomes a tradition of resistance and identity construction by contemporary activists and scholars. Thus, Trask visualizes volcano craters as “labia,” which gives depth to Native Hawaiian beliefs. She is linking women’s body with the creation of life and the creation of land through the volcano. The force of truth and knowledge endowed on the edges of volcanoes to space and light “flooded by the sun of revelation” (25). It is “Nā wahi pana: the sacred places,” which are violated “At midday gargantuan blades” (25). Numerous mo‘olelo tell stories about Pele or draw upon her power.

The literature of Pele and her sister Hi‘iaka holds thick poetic language that celebrates Hawaiian beliefs and artistic skills. Generally known as the Pele-Hi‘iaka story, the body of this literature is claimed by Kānaka Maoli as the cultural and historical heritage of their ancestors. In the political domain, this literature is viewed, recreated, and regained as resistance to colonization (ho‘omanawanui “Pele’s Appeal” vii). Nathaniel B. Emerson situates Pele-Hi‘iaka story(s) “at the fountain-head of Hawaiian myth” and “the matrix from which the unwritten literature of Hawaii drew its life-blood” (Preface). Pele-Hi‘iaka literature manifests Hawaiian traditions within its stories core Hawaiian values like Aloha ‘āina (the love of land), love of ancestors, and celebration of ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i. The story of Pele, life-giver and destroyer, is used to give life through ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i to Hawaiian people and their culture.

Trask contends that the identity of Kānaka Maoli is determined and guided by Kūpuna and the land he/she/they was born in. She argues: “In Polynesian cultures, genealogy is

paramount. Who we are is determined by our connection to our lands and to our families. Therefore, our bloodlines and birthplace tell our identity” (*From a Native Daughter* 1). In Trask’s poetry, the sacredness of the islands stands firm against the intrusion of the western power. These places are connected to history and knowledge. The link between the land and women through image of volcano—as the origin of the islands— intensifies the violence that the colonizer did to Hawai‘i. Since “Our mother is our land,” then any violence against their Is/land extends to all members of the family according to *kanaka maoli* (Trask, *From a Native Daughter* 94).

### Concluding Remarks: Hawaiian Protocol and knowledge in context of Resistance

The literature of resistance by Kānaka Maoli in the Hawaiian Islands has evolved over time, responding to ideological threats by preserving and honoring ancient traditions, while employing contemporary theories and knowledge systems to recall language, land, and people. Hawaiian scholars, activists, and academics have, throughout history, done the difficult work of highlighting how western imperialism functions, and the damage it does, while at the same time honoring and making relevant Hawaiian traditions and stories.

## Chapter Two: African American Folklore in Resistance

African American literature that draws upon African American folklore has an inherent resistance to imperial and hegemonic power. Such literature is not merely a recording or a recreating of African American folklore but rather a recognition of the individuality of African Americans as people of African descent who have carried their stories for hundreds of years. Literature that finds its voice in folklore intersects with postcolonial studies through its insistence on traditional forms and vernaculars. According to Henry Louis Gates Jr., “We must turn to the black tradition itself to develop theories of criticism indigenous to our literature” (“Canon Formation” 25). African American folklore is dynamic with roots in African oral traditions that grew and flourished in the west despite the enslavement of peoples of African descent.

The Emancipation Proclamation of 1865 did not end all forms of subjugation, but it did begin to signal African American liberation, and the fight for freedom continues today. Significantly, in 1817, a ‘double’ displacement in the form of American Colonization Society (ACS) called for the removal of peoples of African descent/American born African (Hill et al. 492). African Americans condemned ACS, and they inaugurated Anti-Colonization Meetings (Hill et al. 483). The conflicts of enslavement and displacement affected African American identity and literature production. However, a connection to the land of their ancestors came through traditions and folklore, allowing them to connect past and present dynamically, which was and continues to be emphasized in African American literature. Thus, African American literary production is not limited to “bondage and naturalistic submersion below the civilized” but rather to “adornment, rebellious creativity, and freedom from imprisoning forms”

(Fowle and Abadie 30-31). African American folklore permits empowerment and subversive storytelling in the hostile landscape of The United States.

African American oral literature and speeches connect to a particular vernacular found in folklore and oral and written traditions from within this community. African American literary production are methods of resistance that exist and grow against western strategies that attempt to keep African Americans illiterate (during slavery up until the nineteenth century) (Gates, “*Race Writing and Difference*” 9; Bailie 90). Thus, recording and adopting African American traditions provide agency to African Americans against a white patriarchal society that positions Black people as “thugs,” “uneducated,” and “violent,” in both public and private spaces. Folklore gives African Americans a voice that carries cultural identity, history, and futures.

This part of my dissertation is devoted to the African American folklorist, anthropologist, and writer, Zora Neale Hurston. She is highly influential to African American literary traditions, African American writers, and folklore studies. Her work came to prominence after her rediscovery by the feminist writer Alice Walker during the 1970s. I focus on Hurston’s adaptation of oral African American language and folklore to demonstrate the importance of folklore as a liberating force for African American identity.

## The Genesis of an African American Folklorist and Writer: Zora Neale Hurston

Zora Neale Hurston emerged as a scholar, activist, and writer during the Harlem Renaissance. Born on January 7, 1891, in Notasulga, Alabama, Hurston was the fifth child of John and Lucy Ann Hurston (*née* Potts). A few years after her birth, the Hurstons moved to Eatonville, Florida, the first incorporated black township. Her father was elected mayor of Eatonville for three sessions. According to Hurston’s autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road*

(1942),<sup>56</sup> Eatonville “is, and was at the time of [Hurston’s] birth, a pure Negro town—charter, mayor, council, town marshal and all.... It was the first to be incorporated, the first attempt at organized self-government on the part of Negroes in America” (1). Life in this African American community led Hurston to develop a profound sense of African American culture and traditions. In fact, even before her work as a professional anthropologist and folklorist, Hurston’s identity formed within and from her community’s interests, and in their practice of storytelling.

In 1918, Hurston joined Howard University in Washington, D.C. Howard University was known as “the capstone of Negro education in the world. There gather Negro money, beauty, and prestige” (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 129). Her academic pursuits at Howard fostered Hurston’s intellectual and literary development. In her writing, she connects the university to an evolution of self—academically and spiritually. She states: “I was so exalted that I said to the spirit of Howard, ‘You have taken me in. I am a tiny bit of your greatness. I swear to you that I shall never make you ashamed of me’” (*Dust* 130). There, she met and was influenced by the founders of the Harlem Renaissance: the educator and philosopher Alain Leroy Locke (1885-1954), and the educator and sociologist Charles S. Johnson (1893-1956). She credits Dr. Johnson as “the root of the so-called Negro Renaissance”<sup>57</sup> because of the success of *Opportunity* magazine (*Dust* 183). The publication of her short story “John Redding Goes to Sea” (1921) admitted her into the world of *The Stylus*, a literary society, led by Locke. After leaving Howard in 1924, Hurston joined Barnard College of Columbia University, where she received her B.A. in anthropology.

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<sup>56</sup> All the subsequent references to book are written as *Dust*.

<sup>57</sup> See section “Harlem Renaissance: A Platform of Resistance,” which contains a preview of the era in which Hurston lived and worked.



During her studies at Barnard, she conducted ethnographic research with anthropologist Franz Boas (1858-1942). She extended her anthropological research through two prestigious fellowships: the Rosenwald Fellowship (1934) and a Guggenheim Fellowship (1935–1936). Her anthropological research enabled her to travel Haiti, Jamaica, the Bahamas, and Honduras. Hurston's approach to research included immersion in the activities and rituals she studied. Her research encompassed "participant-observer" techniques (Hemenway 118), which permitted multi-faceted perception of Black folkloric practices. However, Hurston's foremost location and field of study focused on her hometown of Eatonville, Florida. Eatonville became a center for African American folklore, a place where folkloric traditions were preserved and enriched. Reflecting on Eatonville as a site of folklore, Hurston states: "I hurried back to Eatonville because I knew that the town was full of material and that I could get it without hurt, harm or danger" (*Mules and Men* 2). Her love of folklore and her community, and her intellect facilitated her progressive modes of study in her field. In her studies, she concentrated on urban life and racial equality, and, although her views were seen as radical during this period, Hurston was an integral contributor in the transformative movement of the Harlem Renaissance.

### Harlem Renaissance: A Platform of Resistance

The oppressive history of slavery, the creation of segregation laws, and the ongoing social inequality in the United States spurred a cultural movement spanning the 1920s, which historians term the Harlem Renaissance. It began in Harlem, New York and spread to other regions in the United States, Paris, and the Caribbean. The Harlem Renaissance, an intellectual, cultural, and social phenomenon, manifested through literature, visual arts, music, theater, and social and communal activities of the early twentieth century within Black communities. Alain

LeRoy Locke's anthology *The New Negro* (1925) succinctly defines many of the themes of the Harlem Renaissance.

W. E. B. DuBois, a civil rights activist, scholar, historian, Pan-Africanist, and sociologist, argued for the necessity and significance of *The New Negro*. In an article published in *Crisis* (1926), he states: "This book is filled and bursting with propaganda, but it is a propaganda for the most part beautiful and painstakingly done" (31:141). The main goal of *The New Negro*, according to Locke was to "register the transformations of the inner and outer life of the Negro in America that have so significantly taken place in the last few years" (3). *The New Negro* subverted images of African Americans in western culture; instead, presenting a complex and nuanced representation of African American people, culture, and lives.

*The New Negro* anthology includes different literary genres (fiction and nonfiction, for instance) written by African and African Americans that highlight issues of social inequality, and emerging African American voices. The anthology explored issue of identity politics, often within the framework of the "old" and the "new" Negro. In the text, Locke argues for forms of spiritual emancipation that should follow the physical emancipation of African Americans. In this context, the Old Negro "had long become more of a myth than a man.... His has been a stock figure perpetuated as an historical fiction partly in innocent sentimentalism, partly in deliberate reactionism" (*The New Negro* 3). Thus, the New Negro movement that Locke and contemporary Harlem Renaissance activist called for was represented by the Harlem Renaissance. The movement was empowered by "the will and accomplishments of the people, especially the artists and intellectuals" to resist the prevailing image of African Americans in the

United States of America (Locke xiv).<sup>58</sup> The founders of the movement called for community driven expressions of Black identity.

The Harlem Renaissance endeavored to build and popularize a distinct African American social and cultural identity—an alternative to the racist white patriarchal narrative that placed an “Othered” gaze on the lives, minds, and bodies of African Americans. African American leaders and scholars believed that Black people not only had to engage in the discussion of representation, but also had to produce art to free themselves from oppressive forces. Art, music, and dance, for instance, from the Black community actively combatted problems of representation from outside perspectives. New theories shaped within a Black cultural environment, and Blues and Jazz music were at the forefront. The blues is a technical discourse that enacts agency through poetic and symbolic devices that rupture the history and the lived memory of slavery. Blues and Jazz allowed Black musicians a voice from Black lived experiences; it was an articulation of what it meant to be African American.

These modes of expression eventually became part of the mainstream American national culture. Music performances were held at many nightspots, such as Small’s Paradise, Connie’s Inn, the Cotton Club, and many others (Morris 333-4). The audiences and the policies of some Harlem’s clubs varied (some audiences were diverse, in other clubs the audiences re-enforced segregation), causing frustration and defiance among Harlem activists. The audience of the Cotton Club, for instance, was solely white while the entertainment relied on famous African American musician. Several nightclubs sought to enhance cultural enlightenment; for example, The Renaissance casino and ballroom (1921) and The Savoy Ballroom (1926-1958) (DeAnn 12).

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<sup>58</sup> See the debates on the role of the intellectual in the cultural studies and postcolonial studies.

These clubs not only set the stage for Black music and performances, they also encouraged socializing and celebrating African Americans' achievements.

During this active era of social and culture engagement from and about their community, African American writers set the tone of resistance against persistent acts of violence. Writings by African American authors further explored the unique lived experience of African Americans. They transformed derogatory images created from the history of slavery and white patriarchal discourses. Writing effectively revolutionized the space and language used to self-determine, overturning the homogeneity of the racist view that often depicted African Americans from white perspectives. Hurston's work gazes into/from/of the landscape of the Harlem Renaissance, exploring and critiquing African American literary production. In her essay "Art and Such" (1938), she discusses the necessity of rejuvenating African American discourses to address the challenges the African Americans face as the builders of the American nation. Hurston calls for a discourse that empowers the present and the future of her people rather than merely lament the past.

Hurston outlines three distinctive periods of African American literature. The first period is the slavery era, or the age of silence: "We know about it through tales and music" (*Memories and Other Writings* 905). The second period is the Reconstruction era, which follows centuries of subjugations of Black identity, in which a new African American man was born after emancipation. She conceived this new (hu)man as one who began to vocalize feelings of lamentation. Therefore, his art was "a new cry" of the wounds of slavery (*Memories and Other Writings* 906). Thus, literature of this period reflects the internal sufferings of the now-freed people. Hurston contends: "What went on inside the Negro was of more importance than the turbulent doings going on external of him" (*Memories and Other Writings* 906). The third period

of African American literary production occurred when Hurston produced her work; i.e., the first three decades of the twentieth century. Hurston describes this era of African American literature as the era of “tongue and lung” (*Memories and Other Writings* 906). In era of “tongue and lung,” African American authors found fame and prominence. They became leaders and champions of their race by their own voices and art.

As a New Negro writer, Hurston’s work counters/resists western images of African Americans by breaking the binary of black and white in her work. Hurston’s attention is on social and political issues within her community, rather than focusing on racial issues. Alain LeRoy Locke suggests that the New Negroes writing in/for the Harlem Renaissance created traditions by shifting their writing from monolithic forms found in the western canon to more individualistic spheres that sprang from an African American center. He states: “Our poets have now stopped speaking for the Negro—they speak as Negroes” (*The New Negro* 48). Hurston, as well as many of the New Negro writers, focused on humanistic, social, and philosophical issues in order to free African American writing from (only) the narrative of slavery.

### Folklore and Resistance in Hurston’s Writing

As a novelist, anthropologist, folklorist, and activist, Hurston’s role in the production of African American political discourse and literary traditions is pivotal. Biographer Robert Hemenway summarizes Hurston’s career, stating:

Hurston had been a member of the Eatonville folk community, a New Negro seeking to repudiate racial stereotypes, a Barnard student fascinated with the Western civilization, an anthropologist-folklorist documenting the existence of Afro-American cultural artifacts, and a creative writer contributing to the literary tradition of the English language. (100)

Hurston was a talented and educated New Negro writing during an influential period, and, significantly, she promoted a racial tolerant discourse. However, even in this paradigm of “tolerance,” she insisted on African American pride in race and community. Additionally, she cultivated community folklore as resources for her discourse, destabilizing notions of only one form of idealized and cultured writing. Hemenway points to Hurston’s attempt to bridge high and low cultures. He writes: “[Hurston’s] commitment to folklore as a field of study was an inchoate challenge to the cultural imperialism that could declare these vertical judgments” (100).<sup>59</sup> Resisting cultural imperialism places Hurston within the scope of postcolonial theorist and writers.

Endowed with love for her people’s culture, Hurston turned to the folklife of her community. Hemenway argues that she “helped to remind the Renaissance— especially its more bourgeois members—of the richness in the racial heritage; she also added new dimensions to the interest in exotic primitivism that was one of the most ambiguous products of the age” (*Remembering the Harlem* 319). As a student of Boas, Hurston developed a scientific method of documenting and interpreting African folklore in the diaspora, whether in America or the Caribbean, that enslaved peoples retained from their home countries.

Hurston, however, was a controversial figure among many of her contemporary African American male writers, such as Richard Wright. Wright argues that the mission of the African American artist and art is to uplift the black race from subjugation. However, the focus of Hurston’s writings confronts the boundaries of genre, writes from within folklore, and centers on

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<sup>59</sup> Cultural imperialism is a crucial issue in sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, media studies, and postcolonial studies. In his notable essay “Culture and the Practice of Business History”(1995), historian Kenneth Lipartito defined culture “as a system of values, ideas, and beliefs which constitute a mental apparatus for grasping reality” (2). Edward Said defines Imperialism as a cluster of “structures of attitude and reference” (C/ xxiii). Cultural imperialism is a means of colonial domination, which imposes and forces western ways/views of life/existence. Examples include, the French in Africa, the British in India, and the Dutch in the East Indies.

African American-ness, which does not satisfy Wright's platform.<sup>60</sup> Wright describes her novel *Their Eyes were Watching God* as apolitical. Furthermore, he critiques Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, in an article in *The New Masses* (1937), writing:

Miss Hurston voluntarily continues in her novel the tradition, which was forced upon the Negro in the theatre, that is, the minstrel technique that makes the "white folks" laugh. Her characters eat and laugh and cry and work and kill; they swing like a pendulum eternally in that safe and narrow orbit in which America likes to see the Negro live: between laughter and tears. (Wright 76)

However, he credits her for her ability to "catch the psychological movements of the Negro folk-mind," specifically, "in their pure simplicity, but that's as far as it goes" (Wright 76). In Wright's narrow appraisal of her novel, this is its only merit. Wright's critique of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* did not discourage Hurston's focus and study of African American culture and folklore.

Through her work, Hurston popularized the folk life of African Americans, promoting cultural identity, everyday life, and recording the complexity of African Americans. Locke states: "With [the Negro young writers], even ordinary living has epic depth and lyric intensity" (*The New Negro* 47). Locke's statement applies to Hurston's depiction of the folk life in her work. Pride in the African American community and identity was the impetus for her interest in folklore, and, additionally, it formed her feminist radicalism.<sup>61</sup> Hurston insisted that "the black intellectual had to challenge both the racist stereotype of folk experience in the American

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<sup>60</sup> Refer to Hurston's essay "Art and Such." In this essay, she critiques the ultimate focus on problems with white people. Hurston encouraged African American artists and writers to search for new possibilities for artistic expression and for community service.

<sup>61</sup> Her feminist radicalism is manifested and vocalized through her female fictional characters who are equipped with strong rhetorical statements. This can be seen in characters like Janie in *Their Eyes were Watching God* and Delia in her short story "Sweat".

minstrel tradition and the historical neglect of the folk arts by black people themselves” (*The New Negro* 52). Hurston’s legacy as an activist, researcher, and writer endorses African American folklore as imperative to identity formation, cultural heritage, and community building.

Hurston’s employment of folklore in fiction and nonfiction is resistance writing. Her resistance tradition functions in at least two modes: first, she inaugurated a new form of writing that was not racism-focused; and second, she weaved communal folklife/folk stories, placing African American women at the narrative center. Her two modes of resistance writing effectively illuminate African American women’s lives, emphasizing the challenges they face from outside and within communities.

Hurston’s first method of resistance is grounding her narratives in lower socioeconomic-classes and issues that predominately show wholly black communities. Her second approach to resistance writing critiques women’s position in the African American communities through realistic depictions of their daily lives, and the stories told from this narrative subjectivity. Hurston’s emphasized these narratives purposefully to show the adverse realities of African American life, which were not always the focus of Harlem Renaissance writers. Benjamin Noys<sup>62</sup> argues that there is a positive side to uncovering negativity (“The Power of Negative Thinking”). He argues: “Perhaps there is a necessary place for the negative, a challenge to what is and an attempt to think something different.” He adds, “If everything is just positive then we are left accepting ‘things as they are’ and are constantly forced to adapt to the world and, even

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<sup>62</sup> Noys alludes to the philosophies of Plato and Hegel. He refers to the former’s philosophy of meaning of forms which are not material, as stated in *Parmenides* that “there is nothing without an idea. “As for Hegel, Noys refers to his philosophy of “beautiful soul”— as one of the forms of consciousness— which, he explains, “project their negativity on to the world so as to keep their inner purity”( Noys np ) See G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* [1818], trans. A. V. Miller, (Oxford University Press: 1977), p.207.



more, *be happy* with adapting to the world” (Noys np). Additionally, according to Noys reading of Plato’s *Parmenides*, formless things such as mud, hair or dirt, although shapeless “stickily and persistently remain” (Noys np). Consequently, the negative is “somehow exterior, negligible, subordinate to the true, the good, the one, but sticks around annoyingly, is hard to get rid of, and keeps returning” (Noys np). Hurston’s contribution to the American canon of resistance is manifested by representing the negative and the un-vocalized features of African American communities. Through such representations, she centers female oppression and repression issues. However, even in the midst of writing on the oppression of Black Women, Hurston’s narratives reveal abundant and varied forms of wisdom from within the voices of women from these rural communities.

In her depictions of African American folklore, which she concentrates on in her fictional narratives, Hurston advocates for the liberation of women.<sup>63</sup> She contends that the focus of African American literature should reach beyond issues of racism by representing African American characters as individuals whose lives have complexity. Her work emphasizes this rich complexity through the voices of women. She states: “A great principle of national art has been violated” by not publishing “romantic stories about Negroes and Jews because they feel that they know the public indifference to such works, unless the story or play involves racial tension” (Hurston “What White Publishers Won’t Print” 951). She argues: “The fact that there is no demand for incisive and full-dress stories around Negroes above the servant class is indicative of something of vast importance to this nation” (ibid 950). Through narratives of African American

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<sup>63</sup> Hurston discussed the value of African American rural communities, saying, “Who knows what fabulous cities of artistic concepts lie within the mind and language of some humble Negro boy or girl who has never heard of Ibsen”(qtd. in Hemingway's *Literary Biography* 206).

women, Hurston elucidates the necessity for narratives about the internal emotions and daily lives of Black people.

Hurston represents women from her own subject position while attentive to differences among them. She says, “Nothing that God ever made is the same thing to more than one person. That is natural. There is no single face in nature, because every eye that looks upon it, sees it from its own angle. So, every man’s spice-box seasons his own food” (*Dust Tracks* 45). Thus, she declares the plurality of reality she is registering in her writing. Hurston’s methods for collecting folklore include a focus on gathering places/spaces that illuminate this plurality, or binary divide in men’s and women’s places, within African American communities. She suggests that the places where people talk in communities signify repositories of African American folklife and lore. Hurston writes: “For me, the store porch was the most interesting place that I could think of. I was not allowed to sit around there, naturally” (*Dust Tracks* 46). Hurston’s emphasis on “naturally” denotes codification of Black women’s spaces within the community. They are, in many ways, subordinated into places they “belong” and “do not belong”. Second, Hurston’s emphasis on “naturally” indicates an acceptance of “women’s” and “men’s” places as part of the Eatonville way of life. Third, the emphasis suggests an inability by women to step into men’s social gatherings, or beyond their own spheres.

Thus, Hurston’s voice, which draws upon African American folklore upends homogeneous discourse that was prevalent at that time. The narratives and discourse, even from within African American literary and intellectual groups, most often focused on men’s narratives and perspective. Hurston states: “Naturally, I picked up the reflections of life around me with my own instruments, and absorbed what I gathered according to my inside juices” (ibid 45). She writes from a Black woman’s point of view. Her writing is early black feminist criticism, which

formed to further decipher the unique lived experience of African American women. Many of the issues that African American women faced were rooted in the history of slavery, the othered gaze, and subjugation, which created normative “self” images formed in patriarchal discourses. Hurston’s use of folklore and women’s voices undermines the space and language used to self-determine by decentering men’s stories as central to representing self and identity in America.

Growing up in Eatonville enriched Hurston’s representation of African American folklore. She relates her interest in folklore to her upbringing, stating: “From the earliest rocking of my cradle, I had known about the capers Brer Rabbit is apt to cut and what the Squinch Owl says from the house top. But it was fitting me like a tight chemise. I couldn’t see it for wearing it” (*Mules and Men* 1). Her life in her community fed her writing. As mentioned previously, spaces within her community were instrumental for her research/writing. For example, (reconnecting to the porch theme) the porch and porch-sitters are common motifs in her fiction:

They tell and retell stories or engage in what she calls a “‘lying’ session,” that is, “straining against each other in telling folk tales. God, Devil, Brer Rabbit, Brer Fox, Sis Cat, Brer Bear, Lion, Tiger, Buzzard, and all the wood folk walked and talked like natural men.” (*Dust* 48)

Her writing forms from within Black literary and folk traditions, inspired by the reality she observes in the places within her community. Henry Louis Gates discusses African American literary production (oral and written), focusing on how the African American vernacular tradition articulates existence through the practice, or art, of signifyin(g). Gates states that signification is a black vernacular term that is approximately two centuries old by way of the tales of the “signifying monkey” (Gates, “Blackness of Blackness” 686-689)). He suggests that signifyin(g) is characterized by pastiche, which turns on repetition of formal structures and their differences.

Signifyin(g) embodies the ambiguities of language; signifying wreaks havoc on the signified.

The signifying monkey dwells at the margins of discourse; the monkey puns, tropes, and inhabits an ambiguity of language. He uses repetition and revision, and the signifying monkey subsumes rhetorical tropes. Some tropes subsumed under signifying monkey are as follows: marking, loud-talking, testifying, calling out, sounding, rapping, playing the dozen (Gates, “Blackness of Blackness” 686-689). Therefore, Hurston’s use of vernacular in her writing uses forms of signifying. Also, her use of day-to-day settings (the porch), the types of story productions that occur in these spaces (African American tropes), points to the magnitude of her studies in folklore, and the weight of the stories she choose to tell. The narratives she writes work to empower through the everyday.

Hurston’s attention to individual life narratives in everyday settings focuses on issues that had previously lived in the margins in Black women’s stories. For example, in her research, Hurston writes on field and domestic workers who do not appear in other anthropological and historical studies. In her collection of essays and speeches *A Voice from the South* (1892), Anna Julia Cooper describes an “accumulative period” in which the focus is on “man’s love of gain and his determination to subordinate the national interests and black men’s rights alike to the consideration personal profit and loss” (129-30). This focus drowned out the voices and daily lives of Black women (all women, perhaps). According to Elizabeth Clark-Lewis’s study of domestic workers, a majority of Black women’s wage labor—in America After emancipation—comes from domestic work. She quotes an 87-year-old woman from North Carolina: “No girl I know wasn’t trained for work out by ten. You washed, watched, and whipped somebody the day you stopped crawling. From the time a girl can stand, she’s being made to work” (15). Most of

the characters in Hurston's stories perform some type of domestic work to support their families economically.

Hurston's focus on working class Black women's narratives marks/informs? most of her writings. For example, the character Delia, in her short story "Sweat," supports herself and her husband, Sykes, by washing white folks' clothes. Additionally, in *Their Eyes were Watching God*, the character Janie listens as her grandmother announce: "De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see" (16). Hurston not only writes on working-class women, their labor, and their position with society, she does so through Black vernacular. This juxtaposition of women, labor, and language deploys the messy-ness and sticki-ness that Noys referred to as "stickily and persistently remaining" (Noys np). Narratives of everyday Black women, women's labor, and women's voices are potent and dynamic spaces of storytelling. They begin to encode modes of resistance and freedom.

Hurston's concept of freedom springs from a personal perspective. In her autobiography *Dust Tracks on the Road*, she writes:

What I wanted to tell was a story about a man, and from what I had read and heard, Negroes were supposed to write about the Race Problem. I was and am thoroughly sick of the subject. My interest lies in what makes a man or a woman do such-and-so, regardless of his color. It seemed to me that the human beings I met reacted pretty much the same to the same stimuli. (171)

Hurston's intention, clearly, is to problematize the types of narratives of/from and about African Americans. She troubles the lines of tradition and discourse, both prior and during her time. Additionally, Hurston's work engages with her perspectives and upbringing in Eatonville, an all-Black town.

Hurston's writing acts involve Black realism through the lens of retelling and re-writing folklore into fiction. Her studies as an anthropologist were based on watching, listening, and recording the voices of peoples of African descent while participating with them in daily activities. Thus, she was able to reconstruct and rewrite these actions into modes of fictional work that highlight the voices of the silenced. Much of her work takes the private lives of the African Americans and places it in public spheres as a method of emancipation from slavery narratives. Folklore is deeply connected in Hurston's work.

This linkage between folklore and literature is significant to the discussion of Hurston's work. Contemporary critics and folklorists see that folklore and literature stand not in opposition to one another, but meet within the cultural dynamics of the society that circulate or produced them. For example, Cristina Bacchilega, a contemporary folklorist and cultural-studies scholar, discusses the significance of folklore and literature as a mode of expression. Bacchilega states:

From folklorists we learn to consider the multiplicity of versions through which a speech act or narrative is experienced; and we foreground the tradition and performance interplay as well as the performative elements that contextualize any telling as a retelling or rewriting, but not as replication. From literary theorists who have turned away from reading literature as autonomous ... we learn to read a text as framed by specific institutions – including that of literature – and as a site of dialog and possibly struggle. We work with multiple versions ... their print and performed versions, their textual imbrications, their adaptation in different cultures as well as media, and how they confirm, challenge, subvert received understandings of what they mean. ("Folklore and Literature" 456)

Adapting folklore and literary approaches in studying African American narratives and practices reinforces my argument that folklore is a dynamic entity that enriches people's struggle for liberty. This approach enables researchers to explore meaning(s) embedded in cultural productions and texts. Hurston's narratives seen through the lens of Bacchilega's approach to folklore and literature pinpoints African American social life in relation to historical moments and political powers.

The following two sections, I explore Hurston's employment of folklore to represent African Americans' social and political struggle within a resistance framework. Specifically, I focus on two of her short stories "Sweat" and "Gilded Six-Bit," and her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

### Beyond Racism: Internalized Battles

Hurston's short story "Sweat" focuses on Delia, a devoted Christian woman who makes her living by washing the clothes of white people. Her contentious relationship with her husband, Sykes, is the main focus of the story. As a new way of writing, "Sweat" presents a narrative relying on the depiction of the interior life of an individual rather than on external or a communal struggle of race. The story has an allegorical framework which gives it a universal dimension. Basically, Hurston depicts a dysfunctional/abusive marriage within African American context, while focusing on the Black women's concerns of subjugation within familial relationships.

Hurston's characterization of Delia structures multiple concepts of gender dynamics within African American society. Furthermore, "Sweat" builds meaning around Christian symbolism that is often seen in literary representation from many cultures, which, in a sense, universalizes the narratives, suggesting that African American women's stories are stories of human existence.

The character of Sykes functions as an image of Black men's disempowerment in America. His sense of powerlessness is then placed on his wife through acts of violence/abuse, including physical, verbal, and psychological, which suggests a form of violence genealogy (perhaps inherited abuse). Sykes says, "Ah done tole you time and again to keep them white folks' clothes outa dis house" (*Novels and Stories* 959). He effectively devalues his wife's work (Black women's work). Hurston uses these two characters to illuminate the power struggles within Black communities. Her employment of the trope of a "good Christian wife" works to show the hypocrisy of relationships built on unjust power dynamics and false dichotomies. Hurston uses Sykes as a representation of verbal, emotional, and mental abuse. He describes Delia as a fraud who attends church on Sundays and works for the white people on Saturdays: "Yeah, you just come from de church house on a Sunday night, but heah you is gone to work on them clothes. You ain't nothing but a hypocrite. One of them amen-corner Christians—sing, whoop, and shout, then come home and wash white folks clothes on the Sabbath" (*Novels and Stories* 959). The notion of a "divided" self operates within the forces of these two characters. The climax of the story problematizes the Biblical story of Adam, Eve, and the snake. Hurston re-values women's agency, by Sykes' death through a snake's bite. Sykes is punished from the mouth of the snake who carries poison, which frees his wife. This metaphor suggests that the mouth may be the source/power that ends struggle and oppression. Thus, ending Delia's suffering by the snake is a metaphor for the sometimes un-vocalized words. The snake is often found in African American folklore, according to Hurston collection of folklore.

Hurston recounts the story of how snakes receive their poison and rattlers, according to Southern African American lore in *Mules and the Men*. The speaker, Jim Allen, an elder man, reflects on the creation of the snake: "When God made de snake he put him in de bushes to



ornament de ground” (96). Then the snake complains to God that he doesn’t have anything with which to protect himself from other creatures. God gives the snake poison: “Here, take dis poison and put it in yo’ mouf and when they tromps on you, protect yo’ self” (96). After, a while other creature complains to God that the snake misuses the poison. He says, “He’s strikin’ everything dat shakes de bush. He’s killin’ up our generations. Wese skeered to walk de earth”(96).The snake summoned upon this complaint which he justified as follows: “Lawd, you know Ah’m down here in de dust. Ah ain’t got no claws to fight wid,... All Ah kin see is feets comin’ to tromple me. Ah can’t tell who my enemy is and who is my friend” (97). According to Jim Allen tale, God grants the snake a rattle to warn others of its existence. Symbolically, this African American tale mirrors “Sweat” in that it underscores women’s empowerment, and their struggle towards recognition.

The snake is granted a bell as a means to warning to passersby of his existence. Hurston parallels the narrative, Sykes tells Delia that he prefers the view of rattlesnake over her face: “Ah think uh damn sight mo’ uh him dan you! Dat’s a nice snake an’ anybody doan lak ‘im kin jes’ hit de grit” (“Sweat” 962). Delia, who represents opposition to violence, acts as a sign of a self-realization and of a resistance. These symbolic forms of opposition through the character of Delia, range from protests against keeping the snake in the house, to a declaration of hatred to Sykes.

Hurston’s use of African American vernacular further encodes her texts with power and empowerment through speakerly acts. Henry Louis Gates defines a “speakerly” text as “a text whose rhetorical strategy is designed to represent an oral literary tradition” (181). Hurston application of the technique of “speakerly text” in “Sweat” reinforces the reality and challenges that face African American women in their society. Additionally, they work as resistance.

Delia uses the words of the mouth, shaped by vernacular, to object to domestic abuse. Hence, she presented a form of protest to violence on the bodies of African American women—violence from outside and within the community. For example, when Delia sees the rattlesnake in her home (symbol of safe space), she objects: “You done starved me an’ Ah put up widcher, you done beat me an’ Ah took dat, but you done kilt all mah insides bringin’ dat varmint heah” (“Sweat” 963 ). This protest is followed by her announcement that she is leaving Sykes: “Ah hates you tuh de same degree dat Ah useter love yuh. Ah done took an’ took till mah belly is full up tuh mah neck” (“Sweat” 963 ). This declaration represents Delia’s challenge of the broken system of safety within the symbol of home and community.

On a metaphorical level, the rattlesnake is not only a symbol of hostility but also one of resistance and hope. The snake signifies defiance and a counter attack to violent acts. The snake also represents the strength of the mouth (language/vernacular); a defensiveness carried or held within the mouth inherently. Snakes appear in many forms in classic literature and mythology. In mythological, the serpent denotes conflict, disagreement, eternity, and salvation. For instance, in the epic of *Gilgamesh*, the snake steals the water of life, leaving Gilgamesh with feelings of decay and lamentation. The serpent/snake in “Sweat” divulges concepts voiceless-ness: “Whut’s de mattah, ol’ satan, you aint kickin’ up yo’ racket?” She addressed the snake’s box. Complete silence. She went on into the house with a new hope in its birth struggles” (964). The “[c]omplete silence” creates tension within the narrative.

In “Sweat,” the theme of silence builds through Hurston’s employment of poetry techniques. The snake motif weaves with the alliteration of the sound “s.” This motif is highlighted through words such as snake, syke— sometimes suffixed with s, Sykes— “slither,” “spring,” “Sunday,” “Sabbath,” “skeer,” “snorted,” “scornfully,” “skillet,” and so forth. This

repetition (alliteration) of sound intensifies the unspoken yet heard words of Delia's inner emotional state/interior life. She is a representation of Black women's inner selves.

"Sweat" presents an African American woman's struggle, which exemplifies Hurston's belief that art must uncover African American individuality. This individuality labors toward liberation and the diminishment of African American stereotypes. Furthermore, the story represents the culture of an African American community through acts of "gathering." An example of this is seen as the folks gather in Sykes and Delia's home to witness the rattlesnake. They enter the supposed safe space of home to witness the complex symbol of the snake. In "Characteristics of Negro Expression," Hurston refers to the African American tendency toward communication and outdoor life. She presents this concept when she writes: "That Negroes keep nothing secret, that they have no reserve. This ought not to seem strange when one considers that we are an outdoor people accustomed to communal life" ("Sweat" 839). The people of the town gather/form cohesion together; they are communal. There is power in community.

The main concepts that Hurston present in "Sweat" are societal issues from within African American community settings. Delia's plight, a cruel husband, fuels the entire trajectory of the narratives. However, Hurston intensifies the motif of "gathering," violence, and witnessing through the form of men sitting on a porch discussing the cruelty and infidelity of Sykes. The men enact a form of witnessing; they know about Sykes' violence. Huston furthers the symbolism of gathering? by stressing the resistance to this patriarchal society through the character of Delia and the snake. The story critiques family life; especially, hyper-masculinity that formed from white patriarchal power and is now carried out predominance by African American men over the bodies of African American women.

Hurston continues to confront the cultural, social, and the political circumstances that penetrate the African American family system in the short story “Gilded Six-Bits” (1933). The story center on African American couple, Missie May and her husband Joe Bank. At first, Hurston presents the façade of a happy family—a stable family. Socio-economically, Hurston places the couple as working folks—the husband works for G. and G. Fertilizer company. She overturns notions of happiness and the stability with the character of Mr. Otis D. Slemmons. His character represents wealth. Slemmons wealth is attached to images of ‘gold’ on his body— gold teeth, a ten-dollar gold piece on his watch, and a five-dollar gold piece as a stick-pin. Additionally, the “gathering” talk of townsfolk, including Joe, focuses mainly on the gold given to Slemmons by white women. Joe resents this wealth. Hurston build tension in this resentment when Joe find Slemmons in his bedroom with Missie May. Joe forgives his wife, and keeps their newborn son. Gates contends that Hurston’s story “teaches us about the importance of an emotional attachment over material wealth, about a justice that transcends grief, and about the power of reconciliation” (“Introduction” xix). Hurston’s story illuminates African American family resistance through rejection of money as the main source of power. Hurston writes a complex narrative of relationships, which include familial, communal, and economical in an African American community. The narrative infers that a money-power dynamic is socially constructed and short-lived. Here, Hurston’s emphasis on a capitalist society, underscores the power structure within American society. She illuminates the caplitist system on African American communities and daily lives. Hurston, in a manner, writes the effects and changes on African American traditions.

## Progressive Traditions in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Hurston's novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* traces the life of Janie Mae Crawford, an African American woman with Caucasian-like straight hair. Through Janie's journey from the confines of her family, through the subjugation of her marriages, and her life as she moves towards self-fulfillment and liberation, Hurston constructs a rich inner-life with an African American protagonist. The narrative tension in Hurston's novel builds through the everyday actions of Janie, who at first lives with her grandmother (Nanny), and a destabilization of the hero's tale. Nanny raises Janie with the help of a white family, the Washburns, who treat Janie like their own child. This image of a family dynamic problematizes black-white social dynamics in America. Janie is treated like family by Washburns but ostracized by African American children due to her attachment to a white family. Hurston continues to overturn expectation of identity when Janie only feels independence with the death of Nanny. Janie begins an allegorical journey to achieve liberation after the death of the mother figure, Nanny. She resists the expectations of her community as an African American woman.

Folklore acts as material and instrument in Hurston's *Their Eyes were Watching God*; especially in verbal expression, storytelling, vernacular language, and vernacular characters. Hurston creates vernacular characters and employs folklore to reflect traditions produced in a historical past in order to create alternative futures, or progressive new traditions. In my analysis, vernacular characters are personas who use the language of the African American community, ritually, so much so that they embody their dialogue. Hurston's characters are vernacular personas. Her novel underscores this point. Vernacular persona and vernacular dialect give voice to the novel. Remarkably, using vernacular language and content should place Hurston in the American literary canon, which opposes the British canon; however, her writing was not accepted by prominent writers of her time. The main characters in *Their Eyes were Watching*

*God* promote a sense of African American heritage. The oral traditions that Hurston depicts in this novel emphasize a unique and powerful African American-ness. The main themes in the text, to use Gates words, are a speakerly text; signs of struggle for liberation and for race empowerment; and women's roles in independence.

### “Pheoby, you got tuh go there tuh know there”: Journey as Psychic Decolonization

Hurston prioritizes storytelling as transmission of knowledge and the journey narrative as liberation in *Their Eyes were Watching God*. She presents these two complex motifs in many of her works. For example, in *Moses, the Man of the Mountain*. Mentu, the stableman, tells (storytelling) Moses about the book of wisdom, which is written by Thuth, the god of wisdom[1]. The tale is transmitted to Montue from his forefathers, and the book is hidden in the river in Koptos and guarded by an immortal snake. “[W]hen you read only two pages in this book” Mentu tells Moses “you will enchant the heavens, the earth, the abyss, the mountain, and the sea... you will know the secrets of the deep” (387). Moses not only gains knowledge from the act of being passed down a story, he is also motivated to seek change through the journey. He says, “it may be only an old tale, what you told me, but I mean to search the river art Koptos for that snake and that book.... even if they are not there and never were there, it will be an interesting trip” (Hurston, *Novels and Stories* 388). Similarly, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, after hearing Janie's story, Pheoby, her friend, declares: “Ah done growed ten feet higher from jus' listenin' tuh you, Janie. Ah ain't satisfied wid mahself no mo' (*Novels and Stories* 332). The act of telling and hearing a story (Janie's story) permits the character of Pheoby to realize her position and possibilities as an African American woman. As an embodiment of rebellion, Janie's tale functions as an impetus for change for her community. Not only does the act of

telling and hearing stories signify the ways in which folktales are carried, it also operates as modes of self-realization. Hurston crosses social borders and limitations that are placed on women by emphasizing the power of storytelling in her novel.

Furthermore, the metaphor of Janie's journey towards liberation <sup>64</sup> suggests a hero's narrative in the novel: the journey is not singular, it is not, easy, but it brings reward. Janie's life journey is composed of several routes: moving with Tea Cake from place to place, and her returning to Eatonville, for instance. Janie's trip with Tea Cake ends with his death, which focuses on the allegorical aspects of the journey narrative. Hurston guides Janie through methods of resistance of the idleness with the journey narrative to emphasize the lives of African American women in Eatonville. Janie says, "Ah'm back home agin and Ah'm satisfied tuh be heah. Ah done been tuh de horizon and back and now Ah kin set heah in mah house and live by comparisons" (*Their Eyes* 284). Her dialogue implies that she could not have discovered her identity and power without the without her journey.

Through Janie, Huston shows that change and liberation come from self-directed and community action rather than the places/spaces women gather to gossip. When Janie tells Pheoby that "Dem meatskins is got tuh rattle tuh make out they's alive. Let 'em console themselves wid talk. 'Course, talkin' don't amount tuh uh hill uh beans when yuh can't do nothin' else. And listenin' tuh dat kind uh talk is jus' lak openin' yo' mouth and lettin' de moon shine down yo' throat. It's uh known fact" (*Their Eyes* 285), she is focusing on the internal change that journey brings. The image of the moon's light on women's throats signifies the passivity of Eatonville women's voices. In many ways, these women function as silence; they do not speak

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<sup>64</sup> In her book *Dust tracks on a Road: An Autobiography*, Hurston speaks about how she takes her mother Lucy as a model, and how her mother taught her kids to "jump at de sun" as a way to reach to a higher position of knowledge and in life (13).

the necessary words of freedom. Women's voices are powerful when moved beyond delight and amusement in gossip. As the central character, a representation of empowerment, Janie delivers comparisons between the public life she lives with Joe Stark and the intimate, or richer life, she finds with Tea Cake. Additionally, Janie's relationships form another contrast in lived experience. Specifically, the outward appearance of life fostered through gossip (the outward gaze of Janie's journey), and the reality of her (a woman's) life.

Hurston confirms later in *Moses, the Man of the Mountain* that Janie's conversation parallels the empowering act of storytelling (sometimes she thinks up good stories on the mule, but Joe had forbidden her from indulging). Joe, a manifestation of oppression, forbids Janie's storytelling acts. He states:

You'se Mrs. Mayor Starks, Janie. I god, Ah can't see what uh woman uh yo' stability would want tuh be treasurin' all dat gum-grease from folks dat don't even own de house dey sleep in. 'Tain't no earthly use. They's jus' some puny humans playin' round de toes uh Time. (85)

This signifies the disempowerment of Janie voice. Janie's stories and their (dis) and re0empowerment are thus divided into modes: she likes to take part in talking with the women of the town, but her husband thinks they don't fit Janie's status (silencing women's voices); Janie moves toward liberated storytelling (freeing her voice, women's voices); and Janie passes this form of storytelling empowerment to her friend (representing the necessity of sharing wisdom).

“He could be a bee to a blossom”: Nature as Inspiration and Strength

Moses watches chickens roosting along the barn's ridgepoles under moonlight, with the intention of fleeing from Ramses and Egypt, Moses contemplates: “The man who interprets



nature will always be held in great honor. I am going to live and talk with Nature and know her secrets” (407).

Hurston employs nature as a motif for the power of genuine knowledge. In *Moses, the Man of the Mountain*, for instance, nature is overshadowed and prevented by the tyranny of the Pharaoh (state power). The Pharaoh kept the Hebrew people to build cities and tombs from sunup to sundown. With his “rod of state,” the Pharaoh prevented the Hebrew from leaving/living. They are removed from nature, their state of being. Along this vein, in *Their Eyes were Watching God*, Janie’s character represents empowerment through nature, or a natural awareness of self/identity. She “looked up the road towards way off” (*Their Eyes* 44), and the pear tree, the horizon, the hurricane, and the bees signify the missing center (identity) in Janie’s self, or life.

In this context, the pear tree denotes Janie’s three marriages, and the sense of self she wants to build not only with interpersonal relationships, but also with herself as an important role in identity construction. Marriage, in the novel, is defined in terms of nature. Janie’s desire for true marriage and self are blocked by her grandmother, Nanny. This action is rooted in fear of Janie repeating her mother’s story. Janie says, “Ah wants things sweet wid mah marriage, lak when you sit under a pear tree and think” (*Their Eyes* 43). Her relationship with the characters of Logan and Joe emphasize a false nature, a marriage that “did not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees” (*Their Eyes* 50). Thus, “[Janie] had no more blossomy openings dusting pollen over her man, neither any glistening young fruit where the petals used to be” (*Their Eyes* 112). Through the character of Tea Cake, Janie begins to understand marriage in the true sense (nature) she seeks. His character evokes the romantic and desired image of the husband: “He looked like the love thoughts of women. He could be a bee to a blossom--a pear tree blossom in the spring.

He seemed to be crushing scent out of the world with his footsteps” (*Their Eyes* 161). Although Tea Cake embodies Janie’s perfect image of a husband, she later realizes that, as in nature, things happen unexpectedly.

Talking and gathering to talk, in general, in the form of stories, are part of the African Americans oral tradition and communal knowledge. Once again, I employ the Hurston’s *Moses, the Man of the Mountain* of Moses, here, to exemplify this action. Moses sought to leave Egypt after his steward reported news of the rumors about Moses being a Hebrew. These rumors are so powerful that the Pharaoh plans to seize Moses the next day. The rumors affected Moses’s position among the royal family and destroyed whatever he built. Moses says: “[The Egyptians] wish to destroy me, and so they have quit using sense and taken using phrases. Slogans can be worse than sword if they are only put in the right mouths” (*Novels and Stories* 404). In this context, as in her novels, Huston problematizes speech acts. Slogans, gossip, and chatter do harm; however, the use of oral language/vernacular as well as situating it within the tradition of porch talking is a sign of resistance and insistence of identity for African Americans. I situate vernacular in two specific ways : first, as an assertion of African American cultural; and second, as an act of gathering to speak in a community tradition (mainly men), from which women are excluded.

In *Their Eyes*, the folk of Eatonville are depicted as talking and making up stories as a pastime and a way of perceiving events. Beside this culture of communication, the use of vernacular is a sign of an authentic African American voice. Kent A. Ono and John M. Sloop (1995) argue that vernacular critics should look at their materials “within and from historically oppressed communities” (“Critique of Vernacular” 20). Thus, vernacular is the voice of the marginalized people. Furthermore, Ono and Sloop suggest that the source of the vernacular

“emerge[s] from discussions between members of self-identified smaller communities within larger civic community” (*Shifting Borders* 13). Hence, Hurston’s novel represent the voice of African American minorities living in rural America.

In her study of the crisis of representation during the twentieth century and the current cultural meanings of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hazel V. Carby states: “Oral language, as it was embodied in the folktale in *Mules and Men*, was a sign of an authentic culture that enabled people to survive and even triumph spiritually over their oppression” (83). Carby’s statement provides evidence of Hurston’s methodology of building up an authentic vision of African American community. As I have been showing, Hurston’s intention in the process was to show how this community does not “only” experience racism, the stereotypical problems of African American communities in literature, and her fiction also critiques the community’s perspective on women.

Hurston’s heroine, in this novel, challenges her community’s gender expectations through her journey toward self-realization. The journey also brings about the transformation of Janie and, as Gates puts it, a transformation from “object to subject” (“Negro Way” 187). This transformation signifies Janie’s ability to tell her own story. Janie’s position among the folks of Eatonville engages with the act of speech as tradition and as a part of everyday life that she is denied access to by Joe, her husband. Folks in the novel make statements of “burning” (*Their Eyes* 10). Burning, here, forms questions that are not answered. These forms of “burnings” motivates Janie to tell her story (to speak) to Pheoby (her women). Janie’s speech is in a form of adage<sup>65</sup>, Phoeby suggests that “envious heart makes a treacherous ear” (17), referring to the eagerness of those who envy their friends and make up stories. This knowledge prompts Janie to

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<sup>65</sup> An adage signifies a proverb or short statement that expresses a general truth.

dispel the rumors about her journey, which includes not only Tea Cake but all other men, and her experiences before marriage. Telling her story signifies the act of journeying with another, Tea Cake, because life and empowerment is communal.

To Hurston, the journey narrative represents not only a physical freedom but also an emotional, and psychological freedom. Therefore, freedom builds from within identity of self (something internal) and community (both external and internal). Freedom is the motivating force that uncovers inner power towards self-fulfillment. The novel presents a duality of the meaning of liberation. It is a struggle which is not yet settled.

### “Ah wanted to preach a great sermon...but wasn’t no pulpit”: Resistance in Confrontations

The main focus of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is not the romantic love story, nor Hurston’s protagonist and her marital relationships, but rather, it is about hearing the voices of the silenced. This novel shows the power of resistance by intellectuals and writers like Hurston, which lies in realistic depictions of the culture of a “free” African American community. Hurston represents this depiction of freedom in Nanny’s speech to Janie: “You know, honey, us colored folks is branches without roots...Ah wanted to preach a great sermon about colored people sittin’ on high but wasn’t no pulpit” (*Their Eyes* 31). The pulpit here presents a place to speak “high.” Those who lived during the transitional era between enslavement and freedom did not live in complete liberation; they did not yet have the space to speak for themselves. Hurston employs literature as a place/space to represent the free voices of African Americans, especially women. Literature, therefore, is a platform and pulpit of resistance for the oppressed.

Hurston’s use of a narrator, a subjugated African American, creates a counter representation to Said’s orientalism. Hurston, through her work, chooses to speak for and

represent the subaltern who are underrepresented by prevailing African American discourse. She popularized this liberated language in her essays and books, as well as fiction, which is devoted to representing a realistic social vision of her community. Hurston projected the characteristics of African American folks who “became lords of sounds and lesser things” in *Their Eyes were Watching God* (14). This focuses the position of the African American women in the public life of their communities as empowered.

Talking is the main mode of communication in Eatonville, and Hurston has Janie insist that she tells every single detail of her story to Pheoby in order to be understood; only then can she transmit the story to Eatonville folks. Even in this transmission of story, it is clear that the power of speech, Hurston suggests, is not always positive. It can have destructive as well as constructive power dynamics—counter speeches or alternative narratives can interrupt hegemony. Janie’s return from her journey arouses different feeling among the men and women of Eatonville. The porch-sitters, men, do not say any word; they look at Janie with her “great rope of black hair swinging to her waist and unraveling in the wind like a plume” (*Their Eyes* 2-3). She has silenced their chatter, gossip, with her physical presence, her act of return. Like the men of Eatonville, the women watch as Janie returns. However, their language burns: “What dat ole forty year ole ’oman doin’ wid her hair swingin’ down her back lak some young gal?” (10).

With Janie’s arrival the women of Eatonville

... remember the envy they had stored up from other times. So they chewed up the back parts of their minds and swallowed with relish. They made burning statements with questions, and killing tools out of laughs. It was mass cruelty. A mood come alive. Words walking without masters; walking altogether like harmony in a song. (10)

The women's interest in Janie stems from her journey beyond to confines to their town. Furthermore, the act of Janie telling the story to a third party—Pheoby — instead of relating the story directly to the Eatonville community, functions as a form of respect as well as an insistence on the individuality of self for Janie. It also signifies her assertive character; Janie attributes the women's feeling of envy to Joe's role as dictator. He controlled her relationship with other women:

The wife of the Mayor was not just another woman as she had supposed. She slept with authority and so she was part of it in the town mind. She couldn't get but so close to most of them in spirit. It was especially noticeable after Joe had forced through a town ditch to drain the street in front of the store. They had murmured hotly about slavery being over, but every man filled his assignment. (74-75)

Joe effectively creates a divide between Janie and the other women residing in Eatonville. The fact that Janie tells her story to Pheoby indicates that the function of intimate storytelling relies on a story told by a person to another person. This form of sharing rejects storytelling as a means of telling one person about another person (gossip). Critics connect the act of telling her story to her friend rather than to a public audience, directly, as the African American tradition of storytelling.

Lorraine Bethel parallels the character's sharing story acts to African American culture of storytelling. She contends that “in presenting Janie's story as a narrative related by herself to her best Black woman friend, Pheoby, Hurston is able to draw upon the rich oral legacy of Black female storytelling and mythmaking that has its roots in Afro-American culture” (Bethel 180). Similarly, Pearlie Mae Fisher Peters associates the sharing of stories between the two characters with issues of confidence and storytelling. She writes: “[Janie's] rhetorical style is a typical

Black storyteller as she talks in confidence to a one-woman audience with the belief that her tongue is in her friend's mouth. She is divulging personal facts to a faithful friend and not to a public audience" (*Assertive Women* 127). The culture of storytelling is then related to issues of gender and identity. Linda Tate argues that Pheoby represents rediscovery and a part of the quest for self-identity in her discussion of the role of African American writers in writing history. She writes: "Janie tells her story to make sense of it, to discover the self she has become through the living of experience, and to make tangible her quest for self-identity. While telling is essential to the development of identity" (Tate 16). Hence, Janie remains independent from the community, while, at the same time, a connected member of the community.

Hurston furthers the trope of storytelling between women-friends when Janie is accused of killing Tea Cake. The narrator states: "Janie feels alone" and wishes that "she could make [the white women] know how it was instead of those menfolks" (*Their Eyes* 275). Hurston suggests that the space of women (even white women) has more reciprocity than sharing of the "self" with African American men who do not the silenced woman's voice. In addition to a powerful women-centered speech system, Hurston employs vernacular to play an essential role identifying Janie's voice as an African American woman. In Gates's categories, Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a "speakerly text." Gates explains that "all other structural elements seem to be devalued, as important as they remain to the telling of the tale, because the narrative strategy signals attention to its own importance, an importance which would seem to be the privileging of oral speech and its inherent linguistic features" (195). Hurston's novel inaugurates the African

American progressive text through her use of African American tradition, vernacular, and storytelling.<sup>66</sup>

In depicting the Eatonville community, Hurston emphasizes the use of vernacular, oral traditions, speeches as artful and functional tools. She states that people in Eatonville “[p]assed around the pictures of their thoughts for the others to look at and see, it was nice. The fact that the thought pictures were always crayon enlargements of life made it even nicer to listen to” (51). Porch-talk not only depicts reality for this community through storytelling, it also emphasizes the ways speech and orality are achieved in African American communities. In the novel, the characters’ conversations are filled with colorful and general statements, religious symbols, proverbs, or figurative language, for example. By referring to the habit of people gathering and meeting in porch, Hurston ultimately insists on an African American identity that finds power and indulgence of “the self in the art and wisdom of the group” (Hemenway 2). Again, here, Hurston writes on how the power of individuality stems from community engagement. Hurston’s insistence on the representation of African American tradition signifies her commitment and insistence on the cultural identity of her people within the US’ hegemonic system.

In the “Characteristic of Negro Expression,” Hurston points to the power of African American folks’ rhetoric, one mode of which is the dramatization of feelings and the charge of nouns with action. Hurston identifies some elements of “the Negro’s greatest contribution to the language is: (1) the use of metaphor and simile; (2) the use of the double descriptive; (3) the use of verbal nouns...” (*Folklore, Memoir and Other Writings* 832). African American vernacular has the

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<sup>66</sup> Gates demonstrates that Hurston “is the first author of the tradition [of signifying] to represent signifying itself as a vehicle of liberation for an oppressed woman, and as a rhetorical strategy in the narration of fiction” (*Figures in Black* 241).



“chop-axe,” “sitting-chair,” and “cook-pot,” for instance (Hurstons 832). She attributes this characteristic to the “speaker [who] has in his mind the picture of the object in use” (*Folklore, Memoir and Other Writings* 830). Hurston called this feature “hieroglyphics.” In Hurston’s view “the white man thinks in a written language and the Negro thinks in hieroglyphics” (*Folklore, Memoir and Other Writings* 831). Her novel uses a polyphony of voices from Eatonville marked by folk idiom <sup>67</sup> to suggest community connection through language and as a re-emphasizes on the power of vernacular.

In *Their Eyes were Watching God*, the function of folklore is multilayered. African American vernacular is the essential framework of the novel, affirming its authentic voice from within African American speech and voice. African American folklore and culture are the sources and main subjects of Hurston’s novel. By applying African American expression and depicting characters that reflect this community, Hurston suggests that African Americans are individuals as well as members of a community. Hurston’s novel critiques some of aspects of African American life, but she also affirms a belief in the ability to progress. Robert Hemenway contends, the reader of the novel “learns a profound respect for men and women perpetuating an esthetic mode of communication; the impulse is not to isolate oneself, but to lose the self in the art and wisdom of the group” (2). Hurston once said, “Who knows what fabulous cities of artistic concepts lie within the mind and language of some humble Negro boy or girl who has never heard of Ibsen” (6). Her novel foregrounds art and wonder in the expressions, vernacular, and minds of her characters—in the minds of African American people.

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<sup>67</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin uses “folk idiom” to refer to the language of common (hu)men in contrast to “the language of Church, palace, courts,...[unlike] the tongue of the official literature or of the ruling class” (*Rabelais and His World* 154).

Hurston's novel performs an act of resistance to the dominant ideologies of the Eatonville community, including the community's narrow focus on women's positions (physical, mental, and emotional) add of the USA. Mikhail Bakhtin argues that heteroglossia (the multivoicedness of a novel) allows a broader audience to access its meaning. For him "[t]he novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types [raznorecie] and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions" (Bakhtin 263). The voices of the people that *Their Eyes were Watching God* carries are history, culture, and empowerment from multi-dimensional and multi-voiced perspectives.

Hurston provides an example of differing power dynamics and a divide in historical perspective of a women's role in African American society with the interaction (mode of carrying knowledge) between Janie and Nanny. Through the power of her speech, the character of Nanny, approaches Janie and urges her to marry to avoid ruin. From her perspective, seeking passionate love will lead to Janie's downfall; it will take her, like her mother, on a lost path. Through the performance of marriage, the body of the seventeen-year-old Janie is then commodified and becomes a site of men's desires (narratives): "Whut Ah seen just now is plenty for me, honey, Ah don't want no trashy nigger, no breath-and-britches, lack Johnny Taylor usin' yo' body to wipe his foots on" (*Their Eyes* 37). According to Nanny, Janie's physical desire is a sign of growth into a woman. Moreover, Nanny announces: "Ah ast de Lawd when you was uh infant in mah arms to let me stay here till you got grown. He done spared me to see de day" (*Their Eyes* 30). Nanny's speech underscores her position and experience as a woman of an earlier generation who has suffered because of sexism. In this instance, Nanny is passing down

an “inaudible voice” ( *Their Eyes* 24 ) <sup>68</sup> to her granddaughter through marriage. Acting on historical fear, she is silencing her granddaughter’s physical and vocal desire to her own identity.

Additionally, Hurston employs the grandmother’s experience, and the story she passes down with fear as “mind pictures” to underscore vocalization. She states: “[m]ind-pictures brought feeling, and feelings dragged out dramas from the hollows of her heart” (32). Here, Hurston shows the difficulty in finding a voice (and transitioning between generations) for African American women. This scene further depicts the social status young African American woman (Janie) whose main life goal remains the same as that of the women before—fulfilling physical desires of men. Nanny says, “Tain’t Logan Killicks Ah wants you to have, baby, it’s protection” ( *Their Eyes* 30). Women’s natural desires (state), then, is limited and ended by marriage. Janie spontaneously voices: Me, married? Naw, Nanny, no ma’am! Whut Ah know ’bout uh husband?” and “Naw, Nanny, naw Ah ain’t no real ’oman yet.” (15). This insistence foreshadows future acts of resistance through Janie’s voice (a representation of a new generation of African American women).

Hurston reconceptualizes the traditional role of African American women in her novel. In many ways she laid the groundwork for African American women-centered writing. In the context of African American community men have controlling power, which likens them to the colonizer in colonialism. In *Their Eyes were Watching God*, Janie’s insistence on pursuing her dream is an act of resistance to this type of colonization. On a larger scale, Hurston attempts to

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<sup>68</sup> Janie's power is achieved by talking back to Jody, which makes him "[realize] all the meanings and his vanity bled like a flood. Janie had robbed him of his illusion of irresistible maleness that all men cherish, which was terrible. The thing that Saul's daughter had done to David. But Janie had done worse, she had cast down his empty armor before men and they had laughed, would keep on laughing"(123). Henry Louis Gates Jr. describes this scene in relation to the African tradition of signifying. He points out that Janie not only participates in the rituals of signifying but "is openly signifying upon her husband's impotency" ( *Figures in Black*, 241).

orient her community towards building more progressive cultural and intellectual traditions by raising their awareness of the position of African American women in their own communities.

Hurston writes a complex representation of a new African American woman with Janie—a character who is deeply reflective, has internal struggles and clashes of the “self.” For instance, with how the “business of the head-rag irked her endlessly” (86), and with how Janie reacts to other people’s voices who wonder “Whut make her keep her head tied up lak some ole ‘oman round de store? Nobody couldn’t *git* me tuh tie no rag on mah head if Ah had hair lak dat” (86), Hurston emphasizes the othered/outside gaze that is placed on Janie. Janie is made to cover her hair by her husband, and her community views her as different or other because of her hair, especially when she wears it down. It connects to her agency, but also to her other-ness.

Hurston’s Janie shows the influences of patriarchal domination, and a woman’s right to protest and find her own meaning. The character of Joe, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, displays the politics of power in Eatonville. With the characters of Joe and Janie Hurston not only demonstrates intricate power dynamics between men and women, but also socio-economic power structures within the African American community of Eatonville. Janie’s social interaction is bounded by the authority of Joe—as the Mayor—both in the home and in public spaces. Joe’s position in Eatonville restricts her will to participate in community life. Janie’s role is thus restricted on dual levels:

The wife of the Mayor was not just another woman as she had supposed.

She slept with authority and so she was part of it in the town mind. She couldn’t get but so close to most of them in spirit....They had murmured hotly about slavery being over, but every man filled his assignment. (*Their Eyes* 74)

Joe's character symbolizes men's power in Eatonville; he and his wife (Janie) live in a house that sets them apart from other residents of Eatonville. His house has two stories unlike other houses, an image or façade of power and wealth on display. It was like "[t]he rest of the town looked like servants' quarters surrounding his 'big house'" (*Their Eyes* 75). This materialistic (socioeconomic status) difference creates a divide in the people of Eatonville: "The town had a basketful of feelings good and bad about Joe's positions and possessions" (*Their Eyes* 79). Janie's character counters the position that Joe attempts to structure through power/money. Hurston suggests that Janie feels a "familiar strangeness," as if her status only attempts to imitate white people's traditions.

As an intellectual, Hurston created a new mode of representation that relies on everyday life and traditions within African American societies. This way of displaying the life of women within her community triggered criticism from mainstream African American writers (mostly men) of her time.

*Their Eyes were Watching God*, for example, raises issues within the African American community for which it received criticism from prominent African American male writers. Richard Wright states that the novel lacks political theme. He writes: "The sensory sweep of [*Their Eyes were Watching God*] carries no theme, no message, no thought" (25). But modern critics, such as Sharon Davie, argue that the reader "may begin to accept the master narrative is one of many, that the Master is a relative to themselves. This realization in turn can be politically useful if it helps people make the boundaries of the inevitable hierarchical categories they live by more porous" (457). Hurston's novel shows that representations of African Americans rely on more than racialization; they are modes of resistance through language, storytelling, and the everyday of communities.

## Chapter Three: Situating Iraq within Postcolonial Discourse

Historically, Iraq has seen a plague of colonization from various world superpowers, and its existence on western maps performs the history of imperial expansion. Significant bodies of Iraqi literature, however, reveal a counter history and stories of defiance, which, most often, are not recognized by international scholars. The invisibility of Iraqi literature of resistance continues to permit discourses of orientalism to focus an outside (or othered) gaze upon the landscape, peoples, and literature of Iraq. The othered/othering lens of orientalism attempts to silence the voices and stories of the Iraqi people by situating them within western paradigms and western narratives. In this chapter, I focus on Iraq, suggesting that it is a part of the Third World (I use this term purposefully), a Middle Eastern country that has suffered from colonialism and continues to suffer from its aftermath. However, Iraqi folklore, which is a history of the voices and stories of the Iraqi people, resists.

Folklore is history, and it assists in our understanding of the people's political and social past, framing cultural heritage. History occupies an important function in Iraqi literary productions. Writers such as Selim Matar, for instance, through their writing, propose alternative narratives of past (history), present, and future. Iraqi writers re-imagine and prophesy a future for Iraq that topples hegemonic narratives of occupation and oppression.

Two critical tropes appear in Iraqi literature production: first, exile and intellectuals; and, second, folklore and national identity. In my analyses in this chapter, I contend that the/a writer's use of folklore in an Iraqi resistance context manifests an awareness of the imperialist legacy of erasing and narrowing thousands of years of civilization in Iraq. Iraqi writers, scholars, and intellectuals who engage with literary productions that protest, resist, and voice counter-narratives in the presence of discriminatory power systems, face oppression, jail, and exile. Thus,

Iraqi writers attempt to resist assimilation and hybridity brought by exile in their new countries through writing and activism. Iraqi writers draw upon classical Iraqi folklore such as Babylonian and Sumerian myths and legends as well as temporary/contemporary folklife and environments to navigate the nation's present through the frame of history and culture, which emphasizes Iraq's deep-rooted and vibrant culture.

### Reflections on Exile: The Role of Intellectuals

The most well-known origin for the name Iraq is Uruk in the Sumerian language, meaning the native. Previously, in Greek, Iraq was known as Mesopotamia,<sup>69</sup> which translates to the land between rivers (Tigris and Euphrates) (Leick xiii). Historians widely acknowledge the modern Iraq state as the cradle of the first documented civilizations on Earth.

Arab Muslims assumed control of Iraq after the defeat of the Persian army by the Muslim army led by Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas in 637 CE in the battle of Al-Qadisiyyah. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Iraq came under Islamic rule and witnessed an influx of Arabian migration. As a result, Iraq became an Islamic region and the center of power, wealth, and scientific advancement during the rule of the Muslim Caliphate (in Arabic *khalifah* means the successor).

Abbasid Caliphate Abu Ja'far Abdallah ibn al-Mansur established Baghdad as the capital. From its establishment, Baghdad flourished as the world's center for science, art, and commerce. Translation flourished, and schools and libraries were established. The most crucial folklore literature preserved from this period is *One Thousand and One Nights*. However, after centuries

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<sup>69</sup> Mesopotamia witnessed four civilizations: Sumer, Akkad, Babylonia, and Assure. The Sumerian civilization dynasties started as city states and then developed into fortified centers of power. The Sumerian city-states were unified by the well-known Akkadian king, Sargon of Akkad. Thus, the first empire was established in the middle and the south of (modern) Iraq. Further militarization expanded the empire to include the gulf in the south and the Mediterranean sea in the west.

of successive rule, the Caliphate started to decline and officially ended with the Mongol conquest of the region and the destruction of Baghdad in 1258. After a century of political and cultural unrest, the Iraqi region underwent another colonization.

From the late 14<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Black Sheep Turkmen and the White Sheep Turkmen occupied Iraq successively. From 1593, the Ottoman empire colonized and governed many parts of modern Iraq. However, this rule ended with the British colonization of Iraq after World War I. The strategic position and natural resources of the region made it a prime target for British colonial occupation and rule. Acemoglu et al (2005) link Western European expansion interests to the resource extraction and trade improvements with the New World, which includes the Middle East. They argue: “The rise of Western Europe after 1500 is due largely to growth in countries with access to the Atlantic Ocean and with substantial trade with the New World, Africa, and Asia via the Atlantic” (546). After a national revolution in 1920, British rule was legitimized by a League of Nations Mandate (1920-1932). During this period, Iraq witnessed a cultural renaissance framed by resistance movements such as armed revolutions and defiance through poetry and songs. For example, poetry and songs reflected the transition from one colonial power to another.

Iraqi folk songs epitomize and reflect this period of conflict between the competing expansion of empires. For instance, the song “Chal Chal Alaya el Rumman” (literally, branches of the pomegranate gather over me),<sup>70</sup> a famous Iraqi folk song by an unknown author, gained popularity during the transition from Ottoman to British rule, and it is still prevalent in Iraq today. The motif of resistance is highlighted in the refrain of the song:

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<sup>70</sup> The lyric's translation is taken from <https://lyricstranslate.com/en/چل-چل-عليه-الرممان-zhal-zhal-3alaiya-rumman.html>. To view the song performed by Ilhamn Al-Madfai see YouTube: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yj\\_UuDk\\_PSY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yj_UuDk_PSY).



When branches of the pomegranate [gathered] over me,

The lemon tree came to rescue.

I don't want (to be with) this handsome man.

Just take me (back) to my people.

The unknown composer of the song employs colors (the red pomegranate and the yellow lemon) to represent the two powers competing over the region. Hence, the redness of the pomegranate denotes the Ottoman colonizers and the yellow lemon represents the British colonizers. When the Ottoman colonizers settled in Iraq, they wore red hats known as tarboosh, and, certainly, this coded language would have been recognized as an allusion by the poet's intended audience. The poet employs this symbolization to escape the political risks associated with speaking against Ottoman officials. Thus, this folksong is endowed with enigma specific to local codes. Furthermore, the sweet yellowish color of the lemon implies the British colonizers. The British colonized Iraq under the pretext of saving the Iraqi people from the Ottoman colonizers. However, the speaker in this stanza, a woman, does not accept the handsome Numi (lemon), the Englishman. She instead prefers to join her family/people. This stanza demonstrates resistance through the rejection of outside interference, and, instead, seeks reliance on the Iraqi community.

In the following stanza, the son speaks to his mother, asking her not to wait for assistance from others (outsiders); insisting, instead, that he will act:

No need to wait,

Mom Quit waiting

I will do what I want to do

There is no escape from this.

The speaker, the son, implores his mother to ask other mourning women to go to the shrine of Musa Al-Kadhim<sup>71</sup> and to take off their black dresses:

Go to the shrine of Musa al-Kadhim[ Kāzīm]

There, at the master of all masters

You shall shed your grief.

According to Iraqi tradition, women dress in black during periods of mourning. Periods of mourning may last for years, and they can signify grief for the death of a family member, a relative, or even a neighbor. However, if a joyous event occurs, it is common for Iraqi women to terminate the grieving practice. In the preceding song passage, the removal of the black dress alludes to the speakers of liberation. In “Chal Chal Alaya el Rumman,” the unknown speaker signifies not only the Iraqi people’s awareness of the colonizing desires of the Ottoman and British, but also modes of active refusal of oppression by the Iraqi people toward the colonizers. The resurgence of this folk song, and its persistence for almost a century, implies two factors: first, a cultural pride connected to artistic representations of resistance; and, second, this folk song suggests the persistence of Iraq as a strategic point on the map of neocolonialism.

After 1932, Iraq achieved independence from British colonialism. However, a new era of control and economical exploitation of Iraq’s natural resources began after 1932. Independence did not mean complete liberation of a nation or a country formerly colonized. The colonizer, in many instances, including Iraq’s independence, often leaves its allies on lands and spaces of

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<sup>71</sup> Known collectively as al-Kadhim (الكاظم), Imam Musa ben Ja’far al-Kazim is the seventh Imam of Shi’a, born in 745 and martyred at a prison in Baghdad’s in 799 AD. Al-Kadhim lived and was killed during the peak of the Abbasid caliphate for his political views that challenged the political regime. Millions of visitors flooded to his grave, in Baghdad. As part of Shi’a visiting rituals, visitors of Al-Kadhim’s grave greet the shrine “al Salam on the one who is tortured in the depths of the prisons,” in reference to his imprisonment and death in prison. Note: However respected by Sunni sects, there are also widely-attended rituals for remembering his assassination practiced by Shi’a every year. There are various lore about visiting al-Kadhim, among which is the granting of visitors’ wishes. Thus, al-Kadhim is also known as Bab al-Hawa’ij (the gate of requisites).

formally colonized territories, and the colonizers and their allies remap spaces and locations through the lens of western hegemony. Additionally, historically, western colonizers claim advancement (scientific, literary, and artistic, for example) from particular colonized spaces and peoples as their own.<sup>72</sup> For instance, a current trend, widely circulating on social media, argues that the Iraq modern state was the creation of a British archeologist name Gertrude Margaret Lowthian Bell<sup>73</sup> (1868 – 1926). This re-creation of history attempts to cut the Iraqi genealogical line to older civilizations. Furthermore, the successive colonization of Iraq sought to discredit and “other” Iraq from so-called world progressive movements.

Nevertheless, Iraq has an impressive history of resistance. On a state level, Iraqi political resistance to European neo-colonialism started with the Iraqi nationalist leader Abdul Karim Qasim (1914-1963).<sup>74</sup> During his reign he nationalized the Iraqi territories under the control of foreign countries. He ended the feudal system, which was popular in rural Iraq. Qasim distributed land to house the Iraqi people. However, despite his progressive stances and crucial attempts to build a stable nation with a just and fair ruling system, this era is known as politically unstable and turbulent because of modern contested political parties. His reign, as well as his life, ended during the Ba’ath military coup in 1963. The Ba’ath Nationalist Party began their rule in 1968 in Iraq, lasting until the Anglo-American-coalition military intervention in 2003. The aftermath of the 2003 military intervention continues to impact Iraqi and Middle Eastern

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<sup>72</sup> For example, the contouring of Iraqi borders, which did not include Kuwait, was planned by the Western allies, causing an occupation of the latter by Iraq in 1990.

<sup>73</sup> See for example Christopher Hitchens’s article “The Woman Who Made Iraq: Gertrude Bell Scaled the Alps, mapped Arabia, and midwives the modern Middle East” (2007).

<sup>74</sup> Abdul Karim Qasim is the first president of the Republic of Iraq. He was the leader of a coup that overthrew the Hashemite monarchy. His reign lasted for four years ( 1958-1963). Many Iraqis see Qasim as an ascetic, patriotic Iraqi leader. He is known as al- Za’eem (the leader). However, there his rule is not without controversy, especially by the Pro-Ba’ath communities. For details about modern Iraqi history, including Qasim’s reign, see Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq. A History of Iraq*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

political, economic, and cultural foundations. These ongoing fundamental changes to culture and traditions are aided by exporting and implanting western views through the internet and technology.

### The Formation of Differences by Colonization: Changes in Folklore Tradition

Creating differences and inciting chaos between groups in colonized states is fundamental to the colonialist rationale and power dynamic. This principle is evident in the history of Iraq where colonizers encouraged, and continue to encourage, discord between various Iraqi groups, leading to cultural, social, and economic instability. These forms of colonization and their aftermath resulted in “the decline of civilization, the spread of diseases, epidemics, and famine” (al-Haidari 2006: 41; al-Najjar 2012: 52).<sup>75</sup> According to al-Haidri, the creation of differences between harmonious ethnic groups entails sedition, disorder, and political unrest. These cultural and social differences were/are politicized to serve the colonial and imperial cause.

Iraqi nationhood was built on plural cultural, ethnic, and sectarian backgrounds, which is evidenced in its rich folklore tradition. Folklore represents one of the pillars of Iraq nationhood. In their book *Iraq in the Twenty-First Century: Regime Change and the Making of a Failed State* (2015), Tareq Y. Ismael and Jacqueline S. Ismael conceptualize the diverse beliefs and practices as “Folkloric/social sectarianism” which “refer[s] to the manifestations of traditional identifiers and community cohesion, namely concerning matters of cultural/religious practice and ritual, founding myths and shared beliefs that bind a community within the nation” (78). They contend

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<sup>75</sup> Arhan Ertan, Martin Fiszbein, and Louis Putterman (2016) argue that the presence of epidemic diseases is an indicator of colonization. See their article “Who was colonized and when? A cross-country analysis of determinants” (165).

that colonizers exploited the different ethnic groups in order to rule and control the country. T.

Ismael and J. Ismael state:

Resting upon accumulated beliefs and legends of Iraqi nationhood, Islamic and Arab heritage and a historic pride in one's country representing the "cradle of civilization," Iraqi nationalism had been established as the primary credo, even when the country descended into various forms of dictatorial rule. Secular education and secular state building has had, over eight decades, a homogenizing effect, which allowed for the emergence of a sense of Iraqi nationhood or "Iraqi-ness"—a sense of being "Iraqi" that progressively supplanted one's identity as Sunni, Shi'ite, Christian and so forth. It is in light of this evolved social reality that the recent collapse of Iraqi society is so shocking and tragic. (78)

Each ethnic group has its rituals, lore, and practices—while they share some customs and traditions. However, by creating philosophies of difference between the various groups, colonizers cracked the harmonious cultural fabric, which resulted in "othering" the rich and diverse folklore traditions amongst the various Iraqi groups. Ismael and Ismael contend:

Folkloric sectarianism is especially pronounced in rural areas with homogeneous populations, particularly if these communities are isolated from the cultural multiplicity of modern urban centers; these traditional identities are mitigated and, ideally, give way to civic super-identities that account for variation in social practice and belief. This process is especially marked where the state, as the arbiter of social relations, is perceived as even-handed and neutral. However, where the state is seen as tilted towards one community over another, it risks reawakening feelings of social difference—hence active sectarianism. (78)

Currently, Iraq is an independent parliamentary republic.<sup>76</sup> The political unrest stemmed from colonialism and political regimes, of the twentieth century, caused waves of migration, forced or chosen, to more stable countries around the world. However, even diaspora literature by Iraqi writers, who resisted colonial projects that attempted to demolish the civilization of thousands of years, relies mainly on Iraqi folklore. This points to the significance of this folklore as a mode of resistance. The subsequent sections shed light on Iraqi postcolonial writings and the way it relies on Iraqi cultural heritage.

### Modernity, Form, and Style in Postcolonial Iraqi Literature

On the back cover of her book of short stories, *Ravings Under Occupation: From Literature of Resistance*,<sup>77</sup> Kulshan al-Bayati, Iraqi activist and writer, states:

Occupation is an ugly crime that pushes a person to madness, ravings, and chatter; one is transformed by it into otherness, into a different being.

Under occupation, people rave in an unnatural way, chatter unnaturally, and behave differently, expressing their rejection of the invasion and its inhuman, immoral outcomes.<sup>78</sup>

Al-Bayati's statement suggest the deep-rooted impacts of colonization as well as hegemonic regime forces on the Iraqi state, Iraqi people, and Iraqi cultural expressions. However, whether in poetry or in fiction, Iraqi literature continues to articulate the spirit

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<sup>76</sup> However, because of the intervention of neo-colonial powers, Iraq faces a myriad of challenges in various directions. For example, sovereignty and security, which are fundamental to independence, are challenged by terrorism; ISIS is a recent example. Economically, Iraq is still importing 70% of its basic needs, and Iraq is still unstable economically; there are continuous attempts to destroy its sovereignty. The country is a rentier state, which depends mainly on the exportation of oil as its main revenue.

<sup>77</sup> The book was written in Arabic; however, I do not have access to its content.

<sup>78</sup> The translation of the back cover of the book is by Lisa. L. Wynn, and she quotes Iraq's Modern Arabic Literature (xiv-xv). For more details about Wynn's notes see Kulshan al-Bayati's book *Iraqi Resistance Literature* 2008, Khaldoun.

of protest, revolution, alienation, oppression, and exile. Furthermore, rejection as a form and a phase of resistance prevails in Iraqi postcolonial literature.

During the twentieth century, many intellectuals fled Iraq because of their political affiliation or their critique of the ruling powers. Most spent their life in diaspora; however, they never relinquished expressing their resistance to imperialism by imbuing their writing with local as well as world folkloric traditions.<sup>79</sup> Iraqis, like other postcolonial intellectuals,<sup>80</sup> represent realities prevailing in their country in the aftermath of colonization in their writing, which is a form of denunciation of oppressive rule.

Iraqi writers wrote in different genres—drama,<sup>81</sup> the novel,<sup>82</sup> and the short story—but they are widely known for writing poetry, whether written or spoken.<sup>83</sup> Through the influence of international/worldwide modernity, and modernist poets who enriched Arabic poetry, Iraqi poetry regained its position in the modern Arabic literary scene. The foremost modernization of traditional Arabic poetry, *qasida*, was led by a group of Iraqi poets, including Badr Shakir al-Sayyab (1926-1964), Nazik al-Mala'ika (1923-2007), Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati (1926-1999),

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<sup>79</sup> The early years of the twentieth century witnessed the introduction of modernity in Iraqi cultural scenes and educational system, which is reflected in various literary expressions. Hence, the adaptation of English styles spread in the capital and other cities. As far as literature is concerned, the novel as a literary form arrived in Iraq mainly through translations of English novels. The content of the Iraqi novels reflects the social and the political realities that face Iraqis in the aftermath of colonization. However, Iraqi writers during the reign of Saddam, and because of severe scrutiny, redirected their writings to echo the official political views. Thus, they wrote fiction that mobilized people toward the war as well as national issues.

<sup>80</sup> Western modernism reached Iraq during the first half of the twentieth century through the new educational system that incorporated western canonical writers like T.S Eliot.

<sup>81</sup> Among established contemporary dramatists are Yusuf al- 'Ani (b. 1927) and Jawad al-Asadi. For example, Al-Sady's play *Baghdadi Bath* (2008) discusses the trauma of two brothers after 2003.

<sup>82</sup> Among the novelist, whose writing reflect the political situation in Iraq, are Ali Badr (1964– ), Gha'ib Tu'mah Farman (1927–1990), Shakir Khusbak (1930– ) 'Abd al-Rahman al-Rubay'i, Fadhil al-Azzawi, Khedairi, Khudayyir, Mamdouh, Iqbal Qazwini, Muhsin al-Ramli, Shimon, and Fuad al-Takarli.

<sup>83</sup> However, the Iraqi modernist poet Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahir (1899-1997) continued to write poetry in the traditional form, even though the content of his poetry is political in nature.

Buland al-Haydari (1926-1996), and Sa'di Yusuf (b.1934). Although new in form, free verse<sup>84</sup> Iraqi poetry, exposes political corruption, the degradation of man, and social injustice.

The poetry of Badr Shakir al Sayyab (1926-1964), Nazik al-Malaika (1923-2007), and Abdl Wahhab al-Bayati laments the colonial aftermath that the country experienced during the 1940s and the 1950s. These poets engaged in intellectual circles in the hopes of leading the people of Iraq through political turmoil. The poet al-Sayyab led a troubled life, which made him a poet of resistance on various social and cultural platforms. Much of his writing centers on the use of mythology.

Al-Sayyab was born and raised in Jayku, a small village in the south of Iraq. His mother died during childbirth. Subsequently, his grandmother raised him. He studied Arabic and English, and he worked as a teacher, translator, and journalist. Nevertheless, because of his political views and affiliations, al-Sayyab could not work successfully in the mainstream workforce, and he became a freelance translator and writer. He died young at a hospital in Kuwait—a few miles from his hometown—and could not return to Iraq because he did not have the funds to travel. After his death, his fame echoed in the corners of the Arab world. He is known as the pioneer of Arabic free verse.

### Al-Sayyab through the Lens of Postcolonialism: Mythology and Folklore

Unlike the majority of the poets of his era, al-Sayyab described himself as a resistance writer. The content and form of his poetry is committed to national as well as political issues. He

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<sup>84</sup> Free Arabic verse is introduced to the Arabic poetry through two Iraqi poets Badr Shakir al-Sayyab (1926-1964) and Nazik al-Mala'ika (Starkey 76, 80, 81). The free verse does not conform to the traditional *qasida* rhyme restriction. Rather, it entails “free repetition of the basic unit of conventional prosody — the use of an irregular number of a single foot (*taf'ila*), instead of a fixed number of feet” (Snir 39; Starkey 81; Al-Jayyūsī et al. 630). Salmā al-Khaḍrā' and Tingley, Christopher. *Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry*. Brill, 1977.



opposed the regimes in which he lived (Iraqi Regime of the 1958-63), which subsequently, led him to a life of exile and poverty.<sup>85</sup> He denounced communism at its peak; instead, he supported nationalism and social justice. Al-Sayyab's writing is devoted to postcolonial discourse and focuses on the misuse of power in Iraq. In many of his poems, al-Sayyab visualizes Iraq as an apocalyptic world, anticipating the current western vision of Iraq generated by imperialistic media outlets.

Thus, his writing addresses Iraq's political realities now and then. When discussing the postcolonial discourse in al-Sayyab poetry, DeYoung argues:

Al-Sayyab's version of apocalyptic, of course, precedes the final formulation of "apocalyptic Iraq" in the American media by several decades. So it cannot be properly considered as a response to the limiting conditions the later formulation the latter imposes. Yet the fact that Sayyab's version has status as a discourse—a construct of words not necessarily bound to remain enmeshed within the modes of power relations in a particular epoch or social body—means that it can be seized upon and redeployed at any time ... to form what might be termed a "counter-discourse" designed to critique or resist those discourses encapsulating the epistemes of more dominant centers of power.

(DeYoung 20)

Al-Sayyab, similar to DeYoung's assessment, creates a discourse of resistance against imperial powers through his poetry. The embedded wisdom and the deep insight which DeYoung claims transcends across context, is clearly evident in al-Sayyab's writing. DeYoung confirms:

In fact, it might be difficult for any contemporary reader in the Arab world who is exposed to American attitudes through CNN or other satellite news services to read

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<sup>85</sup> See his letter to Asim Agindi in (El-Hage 65-66).

Sayyab's apocalyptic poetry now as anything but a discourse that counters—or at least provides an alternative to—the Western media image. (20)

Al-Sayyab alludes to folklore and mythology, local and western, to reflect, deliberate on, and destabilize the political crises of Iraq and the aftermath of colonialism. Al-Sayyab affords his poems a modernity and a persistence that confronts and resists imperial hegemonic rule.

Al-Sayyab relies heavily on mythology and folklore in his poetry to de-center power systems in the discourse concerning Iraq. Most critics and scholars engage with al-Sayyab's tendency of employing mythology, claiming it as an aesthetic value and a sign of his split with traditional Arabic poetry. Indeed, al-Sayyab's employment of mythology, especially the western modes, inaugurates a new style that has affected generations of Arab writers after him. Additionally, in his letters, he alludes to the richness and knowledge that folklore and mythology embody. He writes: "I feel that I have lived too long: I have accompanied (Gilgamesh) on his adventures. and have escorted (Ulysses) in his wonderings and have lived the entire Arabic history. Isn't this enough?!" (qtd. in El-Hage 66).<sup>86</sup> However, al-Sayyab's use of western myths in his poetry is an attempt to avoid criticism connected to his political writings. Thus, he employs western mythology to circumvent the corrosive power dynamic of the government.

In one letter, al-Sayyab reflects on the reason(s) for his usage of Roman and western mythology rather than Arabic ones.<sup>87</sup> He explains:

Perhaps the Existentialists are somewhat right – when I apply their feelings to myself....

Nevertheless, man is a being with a history and a past. With this past and these roots

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<sup>86</sup> The letter is written to his friend Asim Agindi on 11 September 1963. In this letter, he states that he is using traditional Arabic medicine as the American and French treatments do not work (El-Hage 66).

<sup>87</sup> Al-Sayyab states that he was influenced by the hegemonic forces and oppression of his time. This affected the content and the style of his poetry. The use of western myth by al-Sayyab, for example, was not for its aesthetic values or the lack or deficiency of Iraqi or Arabic folklore of such myths. Neither was it an admiration/evaluation of the western over the local Iraqi myths.

comes hope... The roots of the past reach across the bald and dry trunk of the present to the top of the tree crowned with leaves, flowers and fruit. This is the window that the Existentialists did not attempt to open: from the past, the future is born through the present.

You notice in my poem ... an attempt to return to the past, to our heritage. I have committed myself to a number of rhymes after exerting a major effort to liberate myself from multiple rhymes.

As for the Babylonian symbols, I have not only used them because of their richness and meaning.... but because the Arabs themselves have adopted these symbols. (qtd. in El-Hage 46-47) <sup>88</sup>

Al-Sayyab's letter illustrates two important points in connection with his use of foreign myths: first, western myths provide a glimpse of hope that he requires in his otherwise existential poems. Second, by using western myths, he is shielding himself from the persecution that he certainly would garner if he used pagan Arab mythology or gods (Shmuel 158-9). Thus, al-Sayyab employs Tammuz, Ishtar, Babylonian myths, Greek mythology, Christian and Quranic figures and stories, and other folkloric images to embed the concept of optimism in his writing. This employment of myths, for al-Sayyab, signifies and symbolizes a cycle of death and resurrection, positioning Iraq as a beacon of hope reborn.

Al-Sayyab's mobilization of mythology generates resistance through language, symbolization, and allusion. For instance, al-Sayyab's poem "Cerberus in Babylon" represents defiance against the regime of Abdul Karim Qassim. To express his opposition to Qassim's

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<sup>88</sup> The letter is written to Dr. Suheil Idris, the editor of *Al-Adab* magazine on 7 May 1958.

communist massacre in Mosul in 1958, al-Sayyab uses images from Greek mythology, specifically, Cerberus, to critique the political climate:

Cerberus is rioting in the sad streets of Babel

the city turns into ashes

Cerberus digs the grave of Tammuz

our slain god, devouring his dead body

sucking the light of his eyes.

Let Cerberus howl in the lanes,

In sad, destroyed Babylon. (Abdul-Razāk 380) <sup>89</sup>

Here, al-Sayyab uses Babylon to epitomize the turmoil and trauma Iraq experienced physically (land, spirit, and body) in the twentieth century. In this passage, Babylon functions as resistance in two crucial fashions: first, it signifies the destruction of an already established civilization by the rulers of an independent Iraq. Second, by using the image of Babylon in connection to gods, al-Sayyab hints at the spiritual powers and community morals destabilized by governmental policy.

Furthermore, al-Sayyab borrows the description of mythical Cerberus to manifest visually and textually the horror and the havoc brought to Iraq by its rulers. Hence, the image, “His three horrible jawbones are a flame” which “blazes in Iraq” (qtd.in Abdul-Razāk 381) works to further modes of resistance through language allusion. Specifically, Cerberus indicates Iraq in the present rather than in a historical Babylon context. This direct reference and the

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<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Hanā' Muḥammad Abdul-Razāk, “Keats, Shelley and Byron in Nazik Al-Mala'ikah's Poetry.” ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1989. pp. 380-381.

connection to the contemporary political plight of Iraq situates al-Sayyab as an organic intellectual <sup>90</sup> who is united with his people rather than the oppressive ruling class.

Al-Sayyab intensifies the critique of Iraq's unjust regime by codifying it in the mythical figure of Cerberus (a representation of evil) when he writes:

Let Cerberus howl in the lanes  
 And dig up the earth looking for the buried god,  
 Our stabbed Tammuz,  
 To eat him: to suck out his two eyes from the roots;  
 To break his strong spine; to smash the jars  
 Before him; to scatter the roses and anemone. (qtd. in Abdul-Razāk 373)

Thus, in this stanza, the post-independent Iraq that al-Sayyab experienced in his day-to-day existence bears witness to the destruction of the past as well as the future. Al-Sayyab signifies this underlying theme through the language of "stabbed Tammuz" who, although buried, is not safe from vengeful Cerberus.

Al-Sayyab<sup>91</sup> does not cease writing about his country's destruction, nor its impact on the future. In many of his poems, the motif of "rain" becomes a symbolic representation, or codified expression, of resistance—and, more, significantly, an ardent defiance of unjust systems of government. Al-Sayyab reflects on the possibilities of revolution in his poem "A City without Rain," and his often quoted "Unshudat al-Matar" ("A Hymn of the Rain").<sup>92</sup> Through the use of rain, al-Sayyab searches for possibilities of revolution among his contemporary Iraqis. For

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<sup>90</sup> Gramsci suggests that there are two main types of intellectuals: traditional intellectuals and organic intellectuals. The first type, often work with of for state powers; the second type, inspire communities toward liberation. Thus, the second type stand against unjust power systems.

<sup>91</sup> Al-Sayyab writes in Arabic.

<sup>92</sup> Abdul-Razāk translated.

instance, in “A City without Rain,” he alludes to the Sumerian gods of fertility Ishtar<sup>93</sup> and Tammuz. Here, Babylonia symbolizes Iraq as a country and a state.

Al-Sayyab’s poem “City without Rain” denotes and transmits the post-independence plight of the state of Iraq by drawing on mythology. However, the search for the possibility of a revolution that does not come to realization; instead, al-Sayyab’s language suggests a sense of hopelessness. The citizens of the city represent the Iraqi people, who do not take the critical steps towards liberation. Thus, for this reason, their city is without rain:

A City without Rain

A fire with no flames keeps our City awake at night,

Its lanes and houses have fever. When the fever goes

And sunset colors it with all the clouds it carried.

(qtd. in Abdul-Razāk 373) <sup>94</sup>

In this stanza, fire signifies the energy and will of the Iraqi people who must resist tyrannical power systems. However, this fire is without flame, implying that the people are aware of the need for revolution, but they do not act. The fire, then, becomes disdain and, instead, infects the people with fever. Al-Sayyab warns Iraqis of the consequences of becoming passive in the face of oppression; the will is there but it requires heat or passion to mobilize to revolution. Here, the rain is the desired outcome; there is no revolution and no rain. The rain could quench the fever, but the people do not seek the relief. Therefore, silence is not the ultimate outcome; in its place, “A spark is about to fly” and “its dead are about to rise” (qtd. in Abdul-Razāk 373).

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<sup>93</sup> *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* defines Ishtar (Akk. Istaru) as “The chief goddess of the Mesopotamian pantheon. In Sumerian she is identified as the goddess Inanna. Inanna/Ishtar possesses a multiplicity of characteristics, often viewed as irreconcilable — she is the goddess both of love and of war” (Myers 652). Inanna/Ishtar is a rain-goddess who, like other storm gods, is also a war goddess and personifies the battle-line. She is also the patroness of prostitutes and other independent women as well as the goddess of the morning. Al-Sayyab uses Ishtar as goddess of fertility and as a symbol of beauty and prosperity.

<sup>94</sup> Here, I use Issa J Boullata’s translation of the poem quoted in Abdul-Razāk’s book.

Tammuz, the god of fertility awakens “from his muddy sleep under the grape bowers” (qtd. in Abdul-Razāk 373). However, the drums of victory could not beat:

The drums of Babel are about to beat, but through its castles

The wind's whistle and the moan of its sick predominate

In the chambers of Astarte

The earthenware censers remain empty with no fire.

Invocation rises as if all the throats of the reeds

In the swamps were crying:

Panting with exhaustion. (qtd. in Abdul-Razāk 373)

The people of the city, in al-Sayyab's characterization, “roam aimlessly like strangers from house to house” ( qtd. in Abdul-Razāk 373). The hands of the goddess Astarte are “empty” while her beautiful eyes—illustrated dynamically in al-Sayyab's “Unshudat al-Matar” (“Hymn of the Rain”)—are “harsh,” “stones as rocks,” and “cold as gold” (qtd. in Abdul-Razāk 373). The theme of the gold in this image signifies sickness, linking the yellowness of the gold with a jaundice of spirit/soul that al-Sayyab finds in the people's apathy.

To resist, in this political landscape, surely entailed at its worst the death penalty, exile, and poverty for al-Sayyab. He, unlike other poets of his time, suffered poverty and oppression, even from the communists from whom he defected. Thus, the undercurrent of “City without Rain” also depicts the powerless gods of Babel Tammuz and Astarte, paralleling his own emotional, social, and financial struggles as well as those of the people of Iraq.

Al-Sayyab continues to employ the image of the rain to represent the necessary resolutions, or changes, that can form through revolution. However, his poems also metaphorically condemn the powerless attempts of the people. His work argues with a sense of

urgency—time is passing, and people are boiling (in the oppressive system) but there is no rain (revolution): “We spent year after year after year watching/ Thunderous, lightning clouds with no rain” (qtd. in Abdul-Razāk 373). While the poem cries for change and passionate action, it also carries the weight of a passive hopelessness that al-Sayyab witnessed.

Additionally, in al-Sayyab’s writing, the image of “wind” often accompanies Sumerian myth. The winds, in the city without rain, are “like storms which neither pass as a storm/ Nor lie quiet—we sleep and wake up in fear of them” (qtd. in Abdul-Razāk 373). The trope of the wind functions as an agent to invoke the spirit of change and revolution. Also, the language the poet calls forward works as an allusion to Percy Bysshe Shelley’s 1819 poem “Ode to the West Wind.” While Shelley finds hope in the revolutionary spirit, represented by the west wind, and he attempts to mobilize people towards revolution and change, al-Sayyab’s poetry functions in a state of never-ending seeking.

Moreover, al-Sayyab creates texture and tension in this poem with the image of a lion, which represents the person/people in political power. The lion uses power against the masses: “What a lion it is, woe to it, from whose wide jaws we suffer” (qtd. in Abdul-Razāk 373). To intensify the motif of the negligence of the leader(s), the speaker asks: “Is there lightning fire or a temple flame in its eyes?” (qtd. in Abdul-Razāk 373). This language forms a concentrated energy (tension) that searches/seeks truth. The search for the source of the fire in the lion’s eyes signifies the confusion of the people. This undercurrent of confusion, or anxiety/tension, focuses on the opaque intentions of the ruler(s). The rulers are unclear in their stance towards the suffering of the Iraqi people.

In “A City without Rain” al-Sayyab depicts the modern Iraqi nation under persecution. Babylon has a type of proximal meaning, as he writes to Dr. Idris Suheil (see footnote 20):



As for the Babylonian symbols, I have only used them because of their richness and meaning. These symbols are still close to us ... they originated in the country where we live today or because the Babylonians were the cousins of our Arab Grandfathers... .

(qtd. in El-Hage 47)

In this communication, being “close to us” signifies al-Sayyab’s usage of myths in connection to postcolonial theory and literature. Furthermore, the city, in his poem, connects to Eliot’s “The Waste Land,” and, in his iteration, it is without rain. The poet states: “But years have passed, so many we have not counted them, / With no rain-not even a drop” (qtd. in Abdul-Razāk 373). The source of hope, that the poet envisions, represented by the image of Babylonian children praying to the goddess:

The little ones of Babel walked carrying cactus baskets

And fruits of earthenware as offerings for Astarte.

Like a shadow of water, plant and fire

A shimmer of lightning lights

Their little round faces as they pray for rain

A field of blossoms is about to open up as they shine. (qtd. in Abdul-Razāk 373)

The children of Babel, with their offerings and their “little hymn,” indicate a form of hope. And, hope is in the signs of rain: “sky lit up with lightning as if a lily of fire / Was opening itself up over Babel” (374). Al-Sayyab ends his poem with notes of hope in the form of rain and salvation: “A shiver of water, a drop which a breeze whispered / So that we know that Babel will be cleansed of its sins” (qtd. in Abdul-Razāk 374). After salvation, change comes to the “city without rain,” in the form of peace and rest. In these last lines, Al-sayyab layers, or encodes, meanings with a connection to history and land, drawing on Iraqi classical folklore.

As mentioned earlier, he employs Iraqi folklore through his reference to Mesopotamian gods of fertility, which, Al-sayyab intensifies through the image of rain, reflecting resistance (and hope) to the oppression of the rulers. Although Iraq appears as “A City without Rain,” al-sayyab permits his poem to end in an expression of salvation and release from tyranny by connecting it securely to Iraq culture in the form of folklore. Older folklore, then, becomes the current of change and a call for action.

Furthermore, throughout his works, Al-Sayyab uses Iraqi, Arabic, as well as western myths to highlight the catastrophic conditions of postwar Iraq, specifically, the British presence Iraq. In his oft-quoted long poem “Unshudat al-Matar” (“Hymn of the Rain” Hymn),<sup>95</sup> al-Sayyab alludes to the various sources of myths. Al-Sayyab wrote “Unshudat al-Matar” while in political exile in Kuwait for his participation in demonstrations against the Nuri al-Said government, which gave Britain more privileges in Iraq.<sup>96</sup> Again Al-Sayyab draws upon Ishtar, the goddess of fertility, emphasizing Babylonian mythology. The poem begins with a description of a woman’s beauty, alluding to Ishtar:

Your eyes are two palm tree forests in early light  
 Or two balconies from which the moonlight recedes.  
 When your eyes smile, the vines put forth their leaves,  
 And lights dance like moons in a river  
 Rippled by the blade of an oar at the break of day;  
 As if stars were throbbing in the depths of them ...  
 And they drown in a mist of sorrow translucent

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<sup>95</sup> The poem was originally published in Arabic in *Al-Adab* Magazine in 1958.

<sup>96</sup> For more information about Nuri al-Said strategies of ruling and his connections to the Turks and British see B. Kemal Yeðsilbursa. *The Baghdad Pact: Anglo-American Defence Policies in the Middle East, 1950-59*. Routledge Ltd, 2005. Especially, pp 53-60.

Like the sea stroked by the hand of nightfall;

The warmth of winter is in it, the shudder of autumn. (Jayyusi 428)

Thus, metaphorically, Ishtar is summoned here, not only for her beauty but also to represent a section of Iraq that is violated by colonization and its aftermath. Consequently, the lines that follow form contradictions:

And death and birth, darkness and light;

A sobbing flares up to tremble in my soul

And a savage elation embracing the sky,

Frenzy of a child frightened by the moon.

It is as if archways of mist drank the clouds

And drop by drop dissolved in the rain. (Jayyusi 430)

This contradiction is evidenced in the tension between the images/language dynamic al-Sayyab creates with “death and birth” and “darkness and light,” as well as “frenzy” and “child,” which appear to problematize Ishtar’s beauty, or more specifically, Iraq’s emotional and cultural state.

Al-Sayyab continues to explore rain as a motif of resistance throughout “Hymn of the Rain.” For instance, he refers to an outside intrusion, shown in the image of the mist that “drank the [clouds’ drops of water]” (qtd. in Jayyusi 428), hence sucking the natural resources of water. Here, as in many of his allusions, al-Sayyab underscores the political climate of Iraq.

In the subsequent stanzas, the poem shifts dramatically to reflect the hope (again) for revolution that can bring fertility (rain) to Iraq. (It is worth noting that al-Sayyab employs the word “Matar” [rain in Iraqi vernacular] extensively in “Hymn of the Rain.”<sup>97</sup>) Al-Sayyab parallels the sound of rain to a lonely child who waits for his mother at night:

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<sup>97</sup> Matar was a common name for Iraqis during the first half of the twentieth century. It is likely that parents found a positive connotation with the name, or perhaps if a new born baby-boy’s birth coincided

Drop, drop, the rain ...

Drip.

Drop the rain ...

.....

Heavy tears are streaming still.

It is as if a child before sleep were rambling on

About his mother (a year ago he went to wake her, did not find her),

Then was told, for he kept asking,

“after tomorrow, she’ll come back again ...”

.....

yet his playmates whisper that she is there

in the hillside, sleeping her death for ever. (qtd. in Jayyusi 428)

The figure of the mother, here, represents the poet’s homeland, which is occupied by the west and misused by its rulers. Thus, whispers of the child’s playmates signify an emptiness in language that only hopes for return but does not actively engage in the process of finding the mother (homeland). Moreover, the rain symbolizes past experiences and the memory of war, hunger, and death with the textual and almost auditory sound of “drip, drop, drip, drop” (Jayyusi 428, 430)

Al-Sayyab furthers his use of myth in diverse manners. For example, he employs mythological fertility, which he represents with the coming of rain and with the figure of the goddess Ishtar in “Hymn of the Rain,” to imply possibilities. This is seen in the following stanza:

Do you know what sorrow the rain can inspire?

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with rainy weather. Matar (rain) appears in many Iraqi everyday conversations. The name may signify and abundance of good fortune; or a bad omen. Additionally, it may suggest an enemy’s visit.

Do you know how gutters weep when it pours down?  
 Do you know how lost a solitary person feels in the rain?  
 Endless, like spilt blood, like hungry people, like love,  
 Like children, like the dead, endless the rain. (Jayyusi 428)

Taking into consideration the post-war Iraq political crisis, al-Sayyab, as a revolutionary writer and activist, illuminates the complexity of the situation through mythology and its connection to Iraqi lore in this stanza. He does not always employ rain as a positive motif. Especially, as this stanza suggests, if the benefits of the rain do not profit the Iraqi people. In this context, then, rain represents not only the distress of the Iraqi people but also the lethargy or stifling rule of the tyrannical government.

In the following stanza, from his hiding place in Kuwait, al-Sayyab addresses the Persian gulf, which is geographically part of Iraq:

Your two eyes take me wandering with the rain,  
 Lightings from across the Gulf sweep the shores of Iraq  
 With stars and shells,  
 As if a dawn were about to break from them,  
 But night pulls over them a coverlet of blood.  
 I cry out to the Gulf: "O Gulf,  
 Giver of pearls, shells and death!"  
 And the echo replies,  
 As if lamenting:  
 "O Gulf,  
 giver of shells and death ... . (Jayyusi 430)

Al-Sayyab mobilizes Iraqis for revolution and returns to the eyes of His beloved—Ishtar—in this stanza. The goddess haunts the poetic form (“Your two eyes take me wandering with the rain”), and the poet intensifies the theme of fertility through passionate language, drawing people’s attention to those who are waiting to reap the fruits of the revolution. Those who are waiting for the rebirth of Iraq. Al-Sayyab problematizes romantic language and the allusion of fertility with the use of “pearls, shells,” and “death,” which represents state power and textual tension.

However, it is evident that al-Sayyab calls for revolution. He writes: “I can almost hear Iraq husbanding the thunder, / Storing lightning in the mountains and plains” (Jayyusi 430). Consequently, the revolution is nationwide through “mountains and the plain,” and is not in located in on place. The revolution and the will of the Iraqi people, however, are scattered and withered by the colonizer’s intrusion. The poet complains: “... if the seal were broken by men / The winds would leave in the valley not a trace of Thamud” (Jayyusi 430). The Thamud were a pre-Islamic tribe who were cursed and destroyed for their refusal of God’s Will. The story is well known in the Islamic world, including the poet al-Sayyab. He uses this religious allusion to reflect the complexity of Iraq as he sees it from his exile. Additionally, stories from the Quran express his fear as well as hope of a successful revolution. According to DeYoung, Thumoud in “Hymn of the Rain is related to the story of Thamuds whose ends is a sign of a rebirth of a new beginning (16). Therefore, al-Sayyab continues to construct images of death and rebirth through poetic form.

Furthermore, al-Sayyab alludes to mythology to intensify the role that the colonizers play in the Iraqi political and economic life. He likens the colonizer to a serpent: “... in Iraq a thousand serpents drink the nectar / From a flower the Euphrates has nourished with dew” (Jayyusi 430). Al-Sayyab suggests that even with people’s will of resistance the

foreigner/colonizer is determined to steal the country's natural resources. The use of the mythical creature connects to the story of creation,<sup>98</sup> thus, the serpent in "A Hymn of the Rain" is significant. It deepens two important concepts: first, al-Sayyab alludes to the colonizer's deceptive ways with connotations of the serpent as the trickster. Second, he depicts the colonizer as an intruder and peace-breaker through image of the serpent "drink[ing] the nectar" (Jayyusi 430). Through these allusions, al-Sayyab warns Iraqis of a neo-colonial power that will manipulate to reach its aim—control of land and resources.

To further this motif, al-Sayyab writes:

Winds of storm and thunder, singing

"Rain ...rain ...

drip, drop, the rain ..."

and there is hunger in Iraq,

the harvest time scatters the grain in it,

that crows and locusts may gobble their fill,

granaries and stones grind on and on,

mills turn in the fields, with them men turning ...

drip, drop, the rain ...

drip. (qtd. in Jayyusi 430)

Al-Sayyab's usage of nature images/themes—rain, thunder, light, mythical creatures such as the serpent, and Islamic legends like Thamud—in the context of the political crises following the 1958 revolution signifies the poet's active engagement in resisting colonialism and oppressive rulers. For instance, he applies myth, legend, and the government's role in "A City without

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<sup>98</sup> For details about the serpent symbolism see Michael Ferber's *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols*. Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pp 186-89.

Rain,” “Cerberus in Babylonia,” and “ A Hymn of the Rain” to register Iraq’s political crisis.

The revolution that al-Sayyab predicts and calls for, in his assessment, should trigger a long line of resistance because, like the rain, an Iraqi revolution could protect from outside intruders and their insider allies.

### The Iraqi Novel, Folklore, Exile, and Nostalgia

Although the Iraqi novel is fairly young, it has become an important part of the intellectual and cultural decolonization practices of Iraq and Iraqi writers. Iraqi novelists, living under Iraqi regimes, underwent brutal governmental censorship. Iraqi regimes were and are aware of the revolutionary powers of novels, and in order to combat the power of the novel, Iraqi regimes narrow(ed) writers’ and intellectuals’ means of livelihoods, forcing them into poverty, imprisonment, death, and exile. For example, Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, Selim Matar, Ahmed Matar, Abdel Khaliq al-Rikabi, and Fadhil Al Azzawi, to name few, were exiled or imprisoned due to their vocal political stances and writing practices.

In spite of these challenges, the novel developed dramatically over the last century, becoming a literary expression that not only engages with narratives of trauma and war but also seeks to establish Iraqi national identity. The Iraqi novel developed as a medium of resistance to diverse forms of tyranny and oppression by depicting and reflecting Iraqi everyday life and sufferings. The Iraqi novel is a distinctive cultural production whose function is to reflect the subaltern life and voice a call for ultimate freedom.

Usually, the Iraqi novel is placed in categories according to the political epochs the country underwent. There are roughly three main periods of the Iraqi novel: the Hashimate



period (1920-1958), the republic period (1958-2003), and the democratic state period (post-2003).<sup>99</sup>

The Iraqi novel often depicts an individual's life and a community culture in relation to the political environments of that time. The first published Iraqi novel was *Khaled Jalal* (1928) written by the Iraqi intellectual Ahmed Mahmoud al-Saed (1901-1937). After the publication of *Khaled Jalal*, Iraqi writers used the form and content of the novel to portray oppression, tyranny, colonialism, and its aftermath.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, the Iraqi novel also epitomizes a dynamic mode of resistance. For example, *Khaled Jalal*, as al-Saed argues, draws upon the lived experiences of his close friend. *Khaled Jalal* registers the life of an Iraqi young intellectual who migrates to India in 1919 to escape the British occupation of Iraq. In this mode, after 2003, the Iraqi novel focuses on the aftermath of the U.S.-led military invasion, and its impact on Iraqi social, political, and cultural life.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> These time periods can be subdivided in many ways. For example, the republic period can be subdivided according to the regime ruling the country. Thus the Abd al-Karim Qasim period (1958-1963) and Al-Ba'ath reign or period (1963-2003). The latter can be further subdivided as marked by war with Iran (1980-1989) and Kuwait occupation and the embargo (1990-2003). These rough subdivisions are necessary in studying how certain novel(s) maneuver around, escape, or represent the government ideology and policing.

<sup>100</sup> The Iraqi modern literary scene is rich with poetry as well as novels and drama. Twentieth century Iraqi writers represent the plight of the country and the aftermath of colonization. The scarcity of translation made Iraqi literature unavailable for western classes. During the twentieth century, for example, novelists and short-story writers impacted the trajectory of the Arabic novel. Such writers include: Dhu al-Nun Ayyub (1908– 1988), Ja'far al-Khalili (1902-1985), Mahmud al-Sayyid (1893-1937), Yusuf al-Ani (b.1927), Gaib Tuma Farman (1927-1990), Abd al-Malik Nuri (b.1921), Abd al-Rahman al-Rubay'i (b.1930), and Fu'ad Takarli (1927-2008) and many others. Among the fiction writers who address resistance to colonialism and oppression are: Ayyub's "The Bridge's girl" and Takarli's *Al-Rajea Al-Baeed* (1980), which is translated as *The Long Way Back*. Contemporary Iraqi writers include: Najem Wali, Luay Hamzah Abbas, Muhammad Khdhayir, Hassan Blasim, Betool Khedairi, Ali Badar, Inaam Kachachi, and Ahmed Saadawi (b. 1975). The latter's novel *Frankenstein in Baghdad* won the IFAF award for 2014. Translations of Iraqi literary works is necessary to promote the voice of the Iraqi people and their national identity and situate them within world literature resistance movements.

<sup>101</sup> For more information and examples of short-stories and novels after 2003 refer to Samuel Shimon's book *Baghdad Noir* (2018). Shimon sees that most of the post-colonial narratives are reflections of the writer's lives and real incidents ( see the introduction). Also, see Shayma Hamedawi's recent essay "The Postcolonial Iraqi Novel: Themes and Sources of Inspiration" (2017). Hamedawi presents an excellent introduction to the post-coloniality of Iraqi novels written after the fall of the Iraqi regime in 2003.

Through different epochs, the Iraqi novel developed significantly from realistic depictions of everyday people's lives under occupation to critiques of the Iraqi nationalistic spirit under the Al-Ba'ath regime to a relatable cultural form of expression. Post 2003, the Iraqi novel signifies a more liberated mode of engagement with cultural and social issues that chronicle not only life during the reign of Saddam but also, more significantly, the cultural and social transformations that the country underwent during this time. Whether in the form of fantasy, like al-Saadaw's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, or in the realistic depiction of the civil war of 2006, such as Ward Bader Salam novel *Eajayib Baghdad (Baghdad Wonders)* (2012), the Iraqi novel established itself through new voices of resistance in the colonial aftermath.

Selim Matar's work, *Women of the Flask* (1990), is a representation of the persistence of the Iraqi novel, culture, and folklore productions that Iraqi intellectuals in diaspora generate. Matar is an Iraqi-Swiss novelist born in 1956 to a middle class family. He migrated from Iraq after he was sentenced to death for his political alliances in 1978. As an Iraqi intellectual, Matar distinguished himself as a humanitarian engaged in nationalist discourse. He advocates for a historical and social approach when writing about Iraq.

Matar's literary work portrays a sense of nostalgia for Iraq history, culture, and national identity, which were/are negatively transformed by oppressive western powers. His writing style is a mixture of fantasy and realism. Fiction, to Matar, becomes a transcendental openness<sup>102</sup> which, with its vastness, is able to convey his political ambition and express his nostalgia for his home country while in exile. His novel, *The Woman of the Flask* (1993) is a representation of an

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<sup>102</sup> I derived the term from Georg Lukács's concept of "transcendental homelessness" translated from German *transzendente Heimatlosigkeit*. He defines the term as "the urge to be at home everywhere" (41). However, Timo Müller translates the term as "transcendental openness" in his *The Self as Object in Modernist Fiction* (10).

intellectual's attempt to recreate a national heritage of storytelling that echoes *One Thousand and One Nights*.

## Exile

According to *The Postcolonial Studies Dictionary*, exile is described as “A condition of being physically distanced from one’s motherland. The term includes both forced migrations, say, during wartime, as well as voluntary migration (called expatriation) where people move from one country to another seeking jobs and a better life” (75). Iraqi writers forced to leave their country—for political reasons—usually insist on their Iraqi-ness through their writing, which draws from the Iraqi culture, landscapes, and, often, folklore. The tone of writing in these works is filled with a sense of glorification of Iraq, as well as sense of deep longing, or nostalgia, which it relies on rather than copying the western outside-gaze placed upon Iraq.

The landscape of the literature written by diasporic Iraqi writers engages with the past, history, and with the cultural heritage of the homeland. According to Edward Said, exile does not denote an ultimate separation from home land, but rather a form of geographic displacement that inspires a profound sense of belonging and nostalgia:<sup>103</sup>

There is a popular but wholly mistaken assumption that to be exiled is to be totally cut off, isolated, hopelessly separated from your place of origin.... The fact is that for most exiles the difficulty consists not simply in being forced to live away from home, but rather... in living with the many reminders that you are in exile, that your home is not in fact so far away, and that the normal traffic of everyday contemporary life keeps you in constant but tantalizing and unfulfilled touch with the old place. (“Intellectual Exile” 114)

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<sup>103</sup> The term “Nostalgia” is crucial for my analyses of folklore and Selim Matar’s works.

In this sense, the designation “tantalizing” signals a sense of nostalgia that resides within the intellectual who is in exile, urging him/her/them to create and to internalize spiritual existence in the memory of their departed homeland and to externalize identity through writing. For Matar, this desire (nostalgia) for the Iraq he knew, develops from and through his writings on Iraqi history, as well as the impacts of the present political conflicts in his home country. Matar focuses on political and cultural analysis in his published articles and journals; however, he also expresses his political interests through his fictional work, Facebook page, and blogs. Significantly, it is worth noting that he publishes his writings in Arabic while the language of his daily life in Switzerland is French. Thus, language becomes another site of resisting modes of assimilation in exile. Arabic signifies his ultimate belonging to his home place/land, Iraq.

Edward Said connects concerns of exile to the difficulties intellectuals face in exile. He differentiates between the “nay-sayers, the individuals at odds with their society and therefore outsiders and exiles in so far as privileges, power, and honors are concerned” (39) and the “uncountable masses for whom UN agencies have been created, or refugees without urbanity, with only ration cards and agency numbers” (“The Mind of Winter” 50). Matar’s writing and identity as an Iraqi intellectual exile fit into the “nay-sayers” category both before and after the 2003 reign he escaped in Iraq. In postcolonial theory, critics contend that regimes banish intellectuals who do not support their cause(s). Hence, Matar, in a true postcolonial resistance sense, exemplifies a rejection of these regimes through his fictional and non-fictional writings, and his dynamic voice on subjects regarding his homeland. As a scholar, Matar’s sense of exile takes on many modes. For instance, on a psychological level, the physical absence of homeland haunts visions of Iraq and its history in his writing—articles, novel, autobiography, and his other forms of writing.

In his autobiography *The Confessions of an Unashamed Man* (2011), Matar contends that exile and estrangement are childhood companions. He says, “The feeling of estrangement is a natural state that all humanity suffers from” (21). Adding, “As for me, ... I spent my childhood in an extreme state of estrangement toward my surroundings,” (22) Thus, his work emphasizes:

- In our neighborhood, I was a poor, disrespected person in the middle of the arrogant rich.
- In my father’s store, I was a little kid in the middle of prisoners and police officers <sup>104</sup>
- In my school, I was a Muslim in the middle of Christian friends.
- In my homeland, I was a dreamer in the middle of people who scorn dreamers.
- Even in the globe, I was a superman, an alien coming from a faraway undiscovered planet. (Matar 22) <sup>105</sup>

In his novel, *The Woman of the Flask*, Matar combines dark realism and elements of the fantastical to examine exile, diaspora, and the complexity of Iraqi identity in flux. Matar, as an intellectual writer in diaspora presents the intricacy and the longevity of Iraq civilization and history not only through a sense of Iraqi “self,” but also through the central female character, Hajir in his novel. Additionally, he accesses Iraqi history through the act of storytelling that Hajir presents. The unnamed and limited narrator, focalized through the protagonist Adam’s experiences, states: “One lifetime was not enough to listen to all her stories. One world poured out of another, one history led to another. It was endless” (23). Matar’s writing, employs Hajir and her travels through thousands of years to carry the stories of the Iraqi people. In a way, the

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<sup>104</sup> Selim Matar spent his early childhood helping his father in his store which neighbored a prison. Thus, most of their customers came from the prison.

<sup>105</sup> My translation from Arabic *l'tirafat Rajul la Yastahi* (translated as “The Confessions of an Unashamed Man” (2011).

characters, in Matar's narrative, who possesses the flask and marry Hajir gain her beauty and stories. Moreover, they add to the narrative history Hajir carries. Hajir, at times, enacts the whole spirit and history of Iraq. She embodies Iraq. She is its history. Thus, Matar creates a formidable female character who speaks for an independent and truly free Iraq.

Matar draws upon Iraqi methodology and folklore through the narrator, Adam, and Hajir. For instance, Hajir is an ordinary woman from the kingdom of Ur, south of Iraq today (Matar 23). Her life changes with her husband, Tamuzi the king of Ur (23). Her family also comes from a "divine line of kings" (23). Ur is a classical city in Iraq, even mentioned in the Old Testament. It is the birthplace of the prophet. The name Tamuzi is constructed in the classical name of the fertility god Tammuz. Tammuz is the pastoral deity of the Sumerian people. Even today, there are extensive celebration for the god Tammuz. These allusions highlight Matar's reliance on folklore, which he signifies through the character of Hajir to build dynamic historical connections. Furthermore, in many of Matar's writings, he suggests that Iraqi intellectuals attempt to foster deep bridges with history and culture through their reference to folklore in order construct or link identity, story, and "self" to Iraq.

For instance, the character of Adam sets off on a journey and searches for ways to stop Hajir from aging. His journey ends when he meets a magician in the desert. He is so obsessed by her that he sees her as Noah's Ark, and as the eternity quest of Gilgamesh. Adam states: "If only I had foreseen the flood and you were my boat, if only I had been Gilgamesh and you were the dream of my immortality. Would that I were a temple and you the goddess. I would be nothing, you would be eternity" (Matar 24). His obsession with keeping her from aging and death, and his subsequent journey, rely not only on allusion to Noah and Gilgamesh, but also on folklore's narrative tradition by employing the trope of the journey and a hero's quest. In this mode, the

hero's fate is tied to exile and return. Additionally, the narrative arc relies on the stories gathered while on the journey and during the time in exile, which become an integral component of the hero's identity.

### Selim Matar: Visual Art and Wounded Identity

Two very specific views on exile and writing inform the term exile in the following section. The first definition is by the African postcolonial writer Chinua Achebe and the second definition is by the Palestinian exile Edward Said. Achebe and Said suggest differing views of colonized exile and agency in Selim Matar's novel. Achebe contends that an African writer, or an exiled writer in this instance, in the metropolis, will embrace western cultural and critical influences. Western influence, in turn, turns the writer into "copycats." The writer attempts to impress Europeans by demonstrating "flair and worldliness" (81). The African writer, according to Achebe, uses this mask of worldliness as a means to emulate current (what the metropolis says are the latest movements) trends (82). Achebe metaphorically, compares such writers to an alien who joins a ritual at its end and copies others without having participated in the experience that led to the last note that s/he is copycatting ( 82). Furthermore, he states:

[E]ccentricities such as his can liven up the gathering and may even save it from righteousness and solemnity; but in the final reckoning the people who will advance the universal conversation will be not copycats but those able to bring hitherto untold stories, along with new ways of telling. (82)

Said in turn suggests the writer and intellectual have specific functions in exile. For Said, to breakdown Postcolonial work of the imagination signifies the presence of an alternative revision of the neglected history of the colonized. Colonized narratives can uncover various points of view other than the monolithic view presented in the colonizer's discourse. The work of

postcolonial imagination functions as history. Homi Bhabha's asks, "How do we historicize the event of dehistoricized?" ("A Spirit of a Calm Violence" (326). De-historicization of events and people, as well as the misinformation on colonized cultures, often comes under the control of colonial policy. Thus, de-historicization is a process through which colonial powers seize control of people, their history, and their culture. Iraqi history and civilization, subsequently, became a book on a shelf or a chapter in a book that researchers from time to time may checkout of a library. Through centuries of direct and indirect colonization, Iraqi history transformed into an archaic addendum with little to no power to counter the imperial systemized devolution of territories.

*Woman of the Flask*, a product of an exiled intellectual, creates a space for recreation of an Iraqi national history through trope of time travel and storytelling by the character Hajir, the woman of the flask. Hajir builds the heritage of a nation through storytelling and journey while in exile. Her movement as a character through time represents captivity, exile, and freedom of mind (the character of Adam and the narrator<sup>106</sup> function in a similar manner). Stories and history, then, are not held by one person (Hajir's husband) but by generations. Iraq's history is a cumulation of stories from many voices. Hajir accumulates stories from people and nations. In this role, she is storyteller and history keeper.

According to Matar, the intellectual writer must predict the future through his/her/their writing. Thus, Matar addresses three additional concerns in his novel *The Woman of the Flasks*. First, the scope of the tales that Hajir narrates to Adam, which are translated through the narrator who represents Adam's split identity, or a split self. Second, the manifestation of nostalgia, exile,

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<sup>106</sup> The narrator functions as a divided self for Adam. Adam's identity is split through exile, and the narrator registers the emotional, psychological, and cultural changes in Adam as he leaves Iraq and acculturates to a new country. The narrator navigates Adam's fear of assimilation and loss of cultural identity. Eventually, the narrator negotiates Adam's return to identity and Iraqi culture.



diaspora, and its relation to the writer's own feelings as an exile. Third, the immigration, regulations, and assimilation of self in exile in a land that is foreign but becomes a part identity. Significantly, Matar's work functions to illuminate these points. However, perhaps even more meaningfully, his work seeks to reimagine a postcolonial future beyond the trauma of colonialism, post/colonialism, and the destructive regimes in Iraq. Matar, through his position as writer/intellectual desires a future, and actively endeavors for this re-revision-ed reality, for an Iraq that remembers its rich culture and history.

In the following pages, the tales narrated by Hajir, the woman of the flask, are examined in relation to national Iraqi history and folklore. Like Scheherazade, Hajir plays the role of storyteller. She relates stories to Adam (who represents the divided Iraqi self in exile because his experiences are focalized through a limited narrator who only knows the thoughts and feelings of Adam, the exile) who is traumatized by his father and his country's political plight beginning from the mid-1950s. Hajir, the woman of the flask, is an enchanting storyteller whose tongue "moved between her lips like a conductor facing an orchestra of words," and whose voice sounds like "a harmonious mixture of conflicting tunes chanted — reverence, licentiousness, the palaces of princes, and shepherds' humble homes" (Matar 69). Hajir functions as a fictional mythical female character who preserves the histories and the tales of Adam's ancestors. These stories were corrupted, hidden, or lost because they were countered or homogenized by those in power, but Hajir as storyteller counters these pejorative colonial narratives with cultural empowerment. Matar bonds Adam and Hajir in the act of storytelling to construct bridges to memory, history, and power.

Matar's *The Wounded Self* (1997) underscores his reliance on folklore and storytelling as a mode of resistance. Matar quotes an African proverb: "Until the lion has his or her own

storyteller, the hunter will always have the best part of the story” as an epigraph to the first chapter of his book *The Wounded Self* (1997). His novel, *The Woman of the Flask*, becomes his platform to enact this proverb, which emphasizes storytelling as a method of overturning unjust power dynamics. She is more than her beauty; Hajir the woman and the novel, *The Woman of the Flask*, then, become instruments to pass down stories of ancestors to keep them alive.

In the novel, Hajir’s stories connect to the protagonist, Adam’s mother, and his mother as home. For example: “From the time [Adam] met the woman of the flask he became a man who lived for the stories she told about his forebears” (35). The tales reconnect him, an exile, to his history of Iraq, and, hence, signify, not only his but also Hajir’s “belonging” to their homeland. The narrator (Adam’s split self) divulges Adam’s mother’s traditional tales of magic—fictional tales that the community circulated for decades. However, Hajir’s stories are not viewed as fictional. She is the embodiment of history and knowledge; therefore, her tales are historical texts: bright with the memories of those days and of our mothers’ stories of “she -devils, monsters, transformations” and that of “the djinn who live deep down underground.” These creatures would “emerge disguised in ... forms of cats and ... ghosts of human beings. (Matar *The Woman of the Flask* 7).

In folklore studies, oral tradition is one medium to explore cultural identities and the cultural histories of groups. Moreover, according to diaspora studies, oral literature is an agent of preservation, resurrection, and a means to trace the histories of ancestors and their beliefs. Communities often transmit orally crucial historical facts and cultural practices from generation to generation. The act of oral transmission creates space for history(ies) to exhibit itself through forms of lore. In Matar’s novel oral traditions, which tend to be myth and legend, connect the narrator and Adam, the protagonist, to the significant and profound histories of Mesopotamia.

What is unique about this connection is its immediateness with the presence of Hajir in the context of Switzerland. The protagonist, Adam, revisits the past and rebuilds a lost civilization's history by engaging with and listening to Hajir's tales. The presence of the woman of the flask, especially as a female storyteller and a reservoir for history, exemplifies the necessity and capacity of the act storytelling as the impetus for persevering cultural history.

Matar employs Hajir's tales as history in this context, and the narrative act becomes a critical call that questions the validity of binary opposites such as fiction/fact, real/imaginary, and present/past. Stuart Hall argues that relationships to the past are more important than the acceptance of an "essentialised past" in thinking about cultural identity ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 394). Identities are not fixed but rather subject to a "continuous play of history, culture and power" (Hall "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 394). Matar typifies this concept with his novel through the character of Adam. When Adam struggles with the presence of past-life memories, for instance: "[Adam] sometimes used to mutter to me over and over again, 'My past is as obscure as a thick forest. As soon as I uproot something, it springs up again in the garden of my present life, in spite of myself.' I don't know whether he considered me as part of that forest" (Matar 9). His character suggests that in the physical movement of exile, there is an uprooting trauma—a physicality to the action. However, uprooting does not merely remove the bad/danger, it also removes the deep "good" that is found in soil of identity in one's homeland. Moreover, exile/uprooting does not remove the memory of home. The body and mind in exile perform a form of duality—the body may exist in a new land but the mind calls forward an intellectual nostalgia of home. Hall refers to these two sides of an identity as "the way we are" and "the way we become" ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 394). The presence of Hajir and Adam suggests

an Iraqi heritage that is a purposeful resistance to the concept of forgetting, and they are grounded and shaped by patriotic zeal.

The woman of the flask as the figure of a storyteller functions as a ritual of remembrance and a revival of the lost home for Adam. Thus, these characters suggest the necessity for community, or gathering together in exile. Homi Bhabha argues that liberating formations may include: “Gatherings of exiles and emigres and refugees, gathering on the edge of ‘foreign’ cultures . . . gathering in the half-life, half-light of foreign tongues ... gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present. Also the gathering of the people in the diaspora: indentured, migrant, interned” (*Nation and Narration* 291). The teller and listener are particularly crucial in this context for oral tradition and for communities in exile. These two roles bond the process of remembering and the self (selves) that exile creates.

Often, the “self” formed in diaspora divides to reflect the dilemma of exile on the intellectual. This division can underscore the writer’s ambivalence to the state of exile, and its impact on issues of belonging. Belonging signifies a presence of resistance in the part of the non-western individual driven to exile for political reasons. Matar shows the concept of belonging at several points in the novel. The narrator in *The Woman of the Flask* notices the change in Adam’s character and a deviation from his “self.” He says, “The gulf between us was widening. His introspection ... to his own country increased. I, on the other hand, ... had more and more appetite for all that was forbidden in my previous life and in the lives of my ancestors” (4-5). Here, Matar carefully constructs a self that questions “belonging” and not belonging of the exile. One self, longs to know the new land; the other self seeks that which is lost through exile. Said claims that there is “always some form of active resistance [on the part of the non-western or the colonized human], and in the overwhelming majority of cases, the resistance finally won out”

(CI xii). The narrator points to Adam's growing interests in Iraqi history, which echoes Bhabha's concept of ambivalence.

Matar's novels, autobiography, and other writing connote resistance through their active engagement with folklore, memory, and Iraqi history. Bhabha contends: "Disobedience within the discipline of civility" signifies a "spectacular resistance" *The Location of Culture* 172). Matar's resistance conforms to Bhabha's concepts through his active disobedience to Iraqi the government, his subsequent sentence of the death penalty, and his continued employment of writing as an agent of change. Additionally, Matar's work as an exile intensifies his sense nostalgia towards his country. Said argues for the importance of the writer in evaluating literature:

To value literature at all is fundamentally to value it as the individual work of an individual writer tangled up in circumstances taken for granted by everyone, such things as residence, nationality, a familiar locale, language, friends, and so on. The problem with the interpreter, is how to read the work and its worldly situation. (*Reflections* xi)

Matar positions the narrator to reflect on the causes that led him/Adam to go abroad:

It may be true that it was all a matter of thinking, logic, fear, and introspection. I represented soul and desire, impulse and spontaneity. Fleeing from internal exile we had opted for exile abroad. Life had become like an express train, and you had to get to know new people and new traffic in new cities. You had to learn new languages and come to terms with names, ideas, dreams, upheavals, setbacks. (Matar 4)

There is momentum and frantic movement in the "upheavals" of identity that exile creates in this passage. In postcolonial writings, K. Nayar writes, diaspora appears either as "the condition of colonialism itself" or as "the condition of numerous ethnic groups and peoples who move,

willingly or under coercion, away from their homelands to other places” (49). The migration toward the west becomes the only possibility of disobedience of the government for Adam’s character.

According to Said, the value of a work of literature lies in the life of the individual who produces it (*Reflections* xi). Paul A. Bové contends that individuals’ political opposition challenges their self-determination thus leaving them with resistance as a choice. Bové states: “[i]n disciplinary societies, self-determination is nearly impossible, and political opposition must take the form of resistance to the systems of knowledge and their institutions that regulate the population into ‘individualities’ who, as such, make themselves available for more discipline, to be actors acted upon” (15). Thus, there is a power embedded in the discourse of individuals within political state power. Resistance is one of its manifestations. Adam’s exile, like Matar’s, was a result of his resistance to the Iraqi government. Thus, the connection between the writer and his protagonist is established. Drawing upon Iraqi myths and legends to reflect on the present and the future shows, history, and the story of resisting European civilization, placing an indelible print on his national identity. Thus, in the first place this novel resisted imperialism by rebuilding national identity. Hajir, stands for the regained histories that help Adam to reestablish his national identity and reclaim his belonging to Iraq. The value of *The Woman of the Flask* lies in its presentation of the challenges that Matar faces as an Iraqi intellectual living in exile.

### Hybridity/Resistance

In postcolonial studies, hybridity is a natural outcome from the meeting of two cultures or more, creating modified identities. Francoise Lionnet states: “The global mongrelization or métissage of cultural forms creates complex identities and interrelated, if not overlapping,

spaces”<sup>107</sup> (*Post/colonial Representations* 7). Lionnet statement points to a conflict between issues of modernity, tradition, and the past; in other words, a conflict between the past as a notion and the relation to it as a process. In the introduction to her earlier book, *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture*, Lionnet argues for a need to study the spaces of interconnectedness and the relationship to the past against the nineteenth-century conventions of classifying worlds into dissonance segments and the cultural identities into segments. She writes, “[the] renewed connections to the past can emancipate us, provided they are used to elaborate empowering myths for living in the present and for affirming our belief in the future” (*Autobiographical Voices* 7). Although not directly under colonization, the characters in *Women of the Flask* represent the cultural dilemma of exiles; in this instance, they find themselves in Switzerland. The narrator voices the absence of homeland and the new community in the following poetic passage from the book:

[We are] like two red fish that time had swept into a river where the water and the fish were both yellow. I tried to survive as a red fish, but he tried to turn himself into a yellow fish. Reality forced us to take on an orange hue as a result of blending red and yellow. (Matar 5)

The narrator compares the cultural differences between Iraq and the Europeans as an urgent situation, pushing the two characters to change. Matar represents conflicts of cultural identity

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<sup>107</sup> Lionnet defines Metissage as a “form of bricolage, in the sense used by Claude Levi-Strauss, but as an aesthetic concept it encompasses far more: it brings together biology and history” (*Autobiographical Voices* 7). Furthermore, Metissage is not only a concept but it is a practice that signifies “the site of undecidability and indeterminacy, where solidarity becomes the fundamental principle of political action against hegemonic languages” (*Autobiographical Voices* 6).

and the necessity of hybridization by using nature imagery in the novel, which the prior passage ideally demonstrates. Specifically, as follows: rivers signify historical flux and cultures; the peculiarities of different cultures are represented by colors; and, finally, members of the exiled culture are represented by fish urged to move in particular currents of change. The imagery of rivers and fish is popular in Iraqi literature. They reflect ecology and the natural environment of the country; perhaps even a sense of nature lost to Iraq. The country is famous for its two rivers, Euphrates and Tigris, and many lakes and marshes, which are famous for fish resources. So, Matar's inclusion of nature imagery is doing double work: calling forward changes exiles experience in diaspora, and constructing an image of home as a tangible space. According to Foucault, space is dynamic. He describes space as:

[T]he present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein. (Foucault 22) <sup>108</sup>

Therefore, the river image that Matar invokes also argues for a juxtaposition of diasporic "self" as near and far and side-by-side. Sabine Müller-Mall, writing about law and space, confirms that Foucault's statement is "relevant to the present moment 2013 it is probably hardly surprising that the 'spatial turn' has not lost its relevance until today and even spread out into almost all fields of social studies and humanities" (69). The complexity of self in exile is still relevant.

In the passage, the color "orange" forms from mixing the narrator and Adam and their native color with new concepts of self alongside European selves. They become hybrid through

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<sup>108</sup> "Of Other Space" this lecture was delivered by Foucault in 1967. It was published French 1984 and translated to English 1986.



necessary camouflaging. This image of the mingling colors implies a relationship between the characters to their realities in the present and with their past, which is further legitimized through the tales Hajir, the woman of the flask, tells. The imagery and metaphors also suggest a form of mimicry in the new country,<sup>109</sup> but rather than accepting a state of in-betweenness, Matar finds meaning in his reference to a Russian proverb: “We’d left the countryside but hadn’t arrived in the city” (Matar 5). In other words, exiles are perpetually in a state of in-betweenness, never fully acculturated to the new country, never fully at home (again) in the home country. Homi K. Bhabha insightfully observes that it “is the trope of our times to locate the question of culture in the realm of the beyond” which, he argues, “is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past” (“Introduction” 1). This is the state of the exile whose life is changed by recreating the history of the homeland civilization in a new land.

### Struggles with the Past: Re-conceptualizing History(ies)

Adam copes with his new life in Switzerland in order to survive, which presents a complex characterization of Iraqis in exile. He works on perfecting the French language, learning computer science, and coping with the new place/ homeland (Matar 9). Here, Matar shows day-to-day challenges and how to engage in resistance immigration. Adam’s past is a mixture of personal suffering and a national history. It is complicated and deepens his sense of alienation. He says, “My past is as obscure as a thick forest. As soon as I uproot something, it springs up again in the garden of my present life, in spite of myself” (9). Matar presents a recognition of self

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<sup>109</sup> According to Lacan, mimicry is a protective strategy that helps the mimic persona to survive. He states: “Mimicry reveals something in so far as it is distinct from what might be called an itself that is behind. The effect of mimicry is camouflage, in the strictly technical sense. It is not a question of harmonizing with the background but, against a mottled background, of becoming mottled-exactly like the technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare” (99).

and identity through Adam. The narrator and Adam are struggling with identity; thus, their daily life reflect this suffering. Adam, however, changes his life, perhaps seeking a fully realized, if still divided identity as an exile in Switzerland, when he begins to know the woman of the flask. She represents the missing part of his identity. A connection to the voices, land, and stories of Iraq. She is his history. She is national history.

## Afterword

The folklore of peoples, communities, and nations carries history and mobilizes populations against oppressive forces. Consequently, western hegemonic states target colonized peoples' folklore to subvert community-engaged empowerment. Postcolonial literature draws on folklore as a means of accessing the past in order to revive, preserve, and enhance resistance narratives, which, in turn, subverts the unjust structures of western power. Folklore does not merely carry place-specific entertainment quality, but, instead, it participates in reinforcing cultural norms onto more comprehensive platforms of discourse that invert the subjugating, stereotyping, and erasing of cultural history. Literature within the scope of resistance intensifies with a reliance on folklore. Songs, tales, legends, vernacular knowledge and language, mo'olelo, and mele, for example, resist western discourse that centers on the exploitation of peoples and cultures while occupying lands and enslaving peoples.

In my dissertation, I bring three different communities into dialogue: Kānaka Maoli, African American, and Iraqi. The literature of these communities/peoples/nations, however distinctive, emerges from and through lines of resistance in a similar manner. Through my work, the reader will recognize the need to revive folklore, not only to establish a national identity for specific cultures but also to call the communities forward in acts of resistance. This call for folklore argues that the past and present will not die, and folklore is a means to defy hegemonic powers. Through this work, I hope to add to academic discourse in the field of folklore studies, creating an archive with an ontological dimension, in which the focus shifts from the oppressor to the oppressed.

Postcolonial literature that relies on folklore illuminates the methods through which cultures were/are hybridized, and how discrete groups resisted (resist) pressures to assimilate. The pressure to assimilate resides in many facets of day-to-day life in occupied countries and societies; the west brought, and still brings, these changes through trade, missionaries, the media, movies, and capitalism. While some say it may be impossible to stop the currents of capitalism and the intrusion of other manifestations of (neo) colonialism, academics, activists, and writers must highlight and uncover the extensive history of resistance to globalization and oppression through folklore—and they do so within these three specific groups.

Stories are knowledge. Mo‘olelo have the dynamic power to resist and recover systems of Kānaka Maoli epistemologies. For Kānaka Maoli, land feeds, and the lands of Hawai‘i are ancestors and sacred. Additionally, lands are storied, each place and place name in Hawai‘i carry significant history and meaning. Western modes of knowledge attempted (still attempt) to erase the diverse knowledge systems of Kākanaka Maoli through colonialism and capitalism. Kānaka Moali scholars resist racism, oppression, and colonialism with the use of folklore, land, and geneology (all work in unison). Land (and the mo‘olelo connected to land) in this frame, are of vital significance for Kākanaka Moali; they are an intellectual basis that has the potential to produce opposition and endurance.

Land, mo‘olelo, and Kānaka Maoli, merge to work against racist colonial practices that seek to dislocate Indigenous and Native peoples from land. Leon No‘eau Peralto contends that land is ancestor and nourisher. When speaking of Mauna Kea, he finds that “It has been said that we are all branches of the genealogical trees established long ago by our kūpuna who birthed us into existence” (233). He speaks of nourishment from “many piko (umbilical cord, center) that connect... the Kānaka ‘Ōiwi to those kūpuna. Maunakea stands proudly as the highest peak, and

piko, in all of Oceania” (233). Mauna Kea gives identity and sustenance, which in turn requires a sense of honor and responsibility. Currently, mo‘olelo as resistance unfold on Mauna Kea as the Kū Kia‘i protect this sacred place.

Zora Neale Hurston’s writing is a prime example of resistance through African American folklore tradition. Her work seeks an African American center that can uplift communities. In her article, “High John De Conquer” (1943), she states:

So the brother in black offers these United States the source of courage that endures and laughter. High John de Conquer. If the news from overseas read bad, if the nation inside seems like it is stuck in the Tar Baby, listen hard, and you will hear High John de Conquer treading on his singing-drum. You will know then that no matter how bad things look now, it will be worse for those who seek to oppress us. ... White America, take a laugh from out of our black mouths, and win! We give you High John de Conquer. (qtd. in Gates and Tatar)

Hurston recognizes African Americans as builders of a nation rather than outsiders who lament their fate on the American continent. At the same time, her discourse derisively critiques and condemns the oppression and the brutality of slavery. The lore of and from the African American community is a living entity that reflects defiance against western powers. African American lore often relies on qualities of entertainment; however, even if the tone is playful, it charges forward with a reliance on signifiers of resistance. Folklore, within an African American context, draws upon African folklore and belief systems that were carried, transmitted, and circulated orally among enslaved people in America.

Similarly, for Iraqi intellectuals, scholars, and writers, folklore transmits modes of power and self-actualization. Selim Matar in his book *The Wounded Self*, relates an anecdote to show the impacts of colonization on the Iraqi world view. He states:

When I was in my twenties, I sought the opinion of an elder to understand how he looked to the crises of Arabs during the twentieth century. I said: “O, Uncle, if Islam is the religion of Allah and that Muslims are closer to the Divine mercy than other people; then, why are [Muslim] Arabs backward and weak in comparison to the Jewish people and the west?

The man’s answer was simple, direct, and sincere, reflecting the remnants of the prevailing Ottoman mentality:

Listen, my son, the old man says: God offers a gift to each group. Thus, Jewish people have money, and Christians have science, but we (Arab Muslims) have genuine faith. Therefore, my son, they [the west] have the money and this transient life, but we have God and the Hereafter. Paradise awaits us if keep our religion and abandon the pleasures of the world. (al-Shwillay translation, Matar 7)

Matar emphasizes the influence of lore inherited from years of colonization. These inherited stories construct ideologies, fuel political action, and reinforce the culture and cultural production of literature. There are three main groups of peoples in Iraq, and each has specific lore that persisted through years, transcending hegemonic powers enforced by different regimes. These groups are the Kurds in the north, the Sunni in the north and west of Baghdad, and the Shiite in Baghdad and the south of the country.

Literature of resistance is a vital medium to mobilize oppressed people towards decolonization and liberation. The literature that built on, represents, and reflects on the will of people through their lore and political discourses can undermine imperial plans.

This work represents and reflects all the contradictions and commitments that folklore brings to life.

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